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September 2015

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LIONEL MESSI

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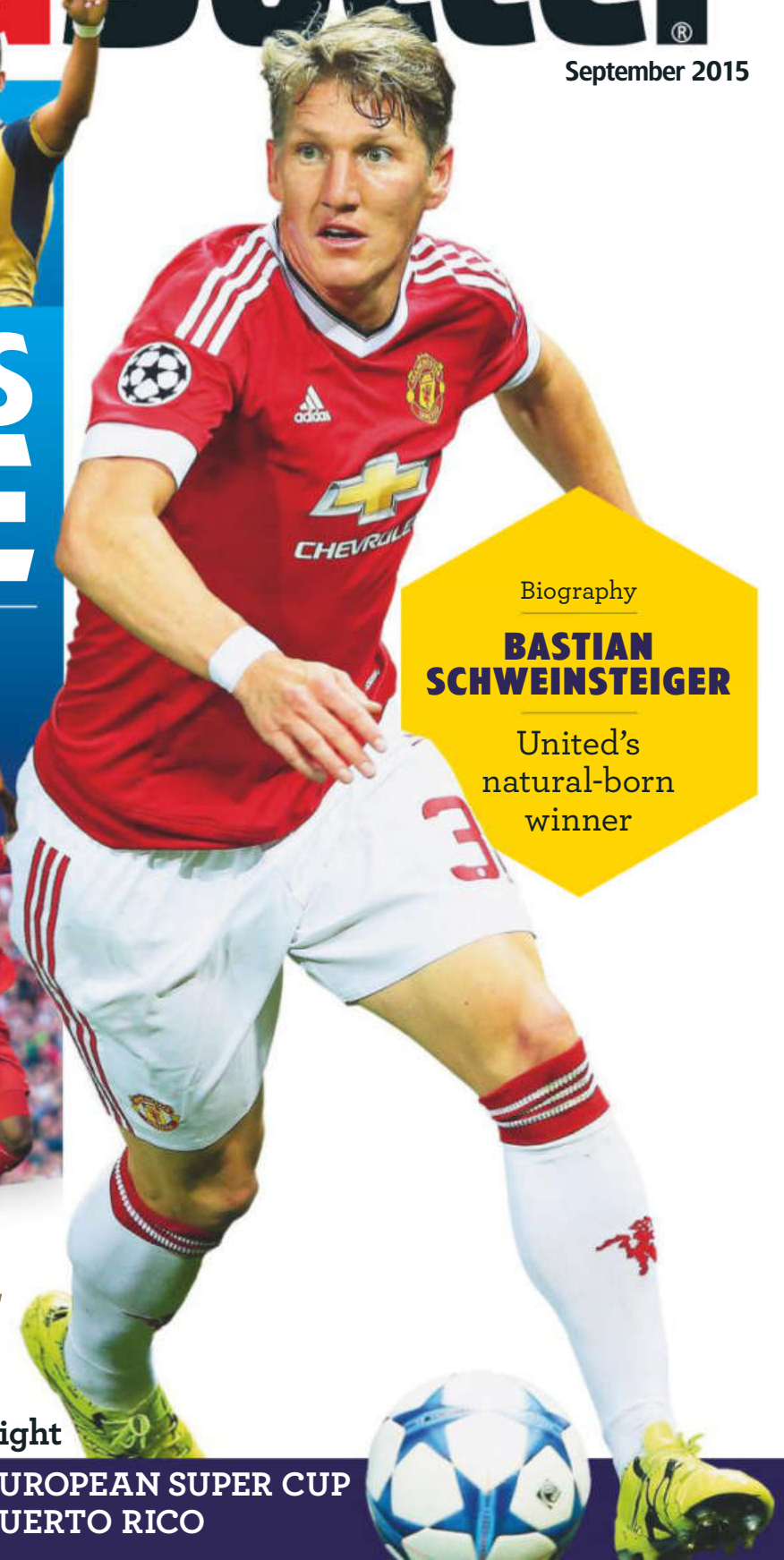

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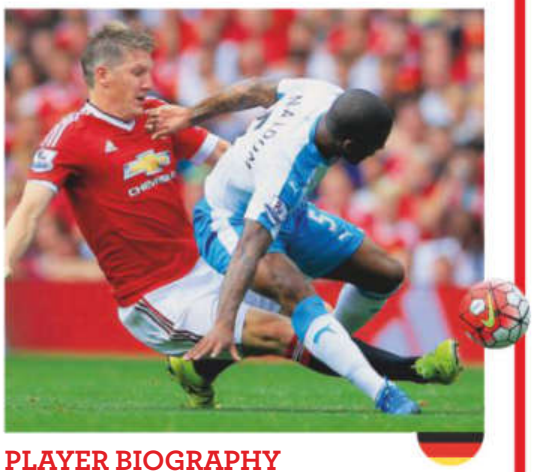

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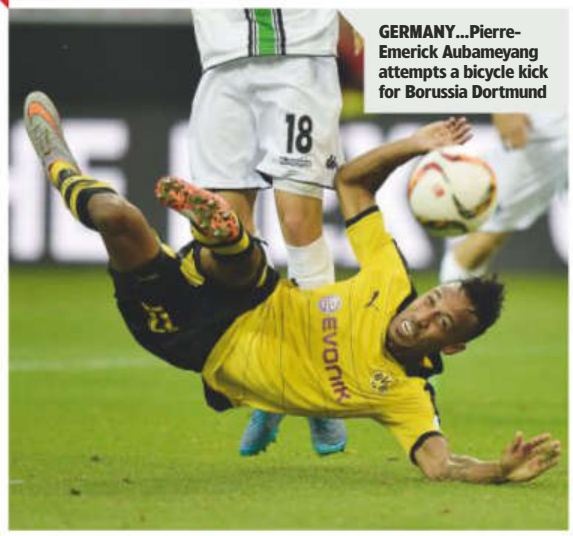

GERMANY...Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang attempts a bicycle kick for Borussia Dortmund

PORTUGAL...Sporting Lisbon fans peer through a massive banner as they watch a Champions League game

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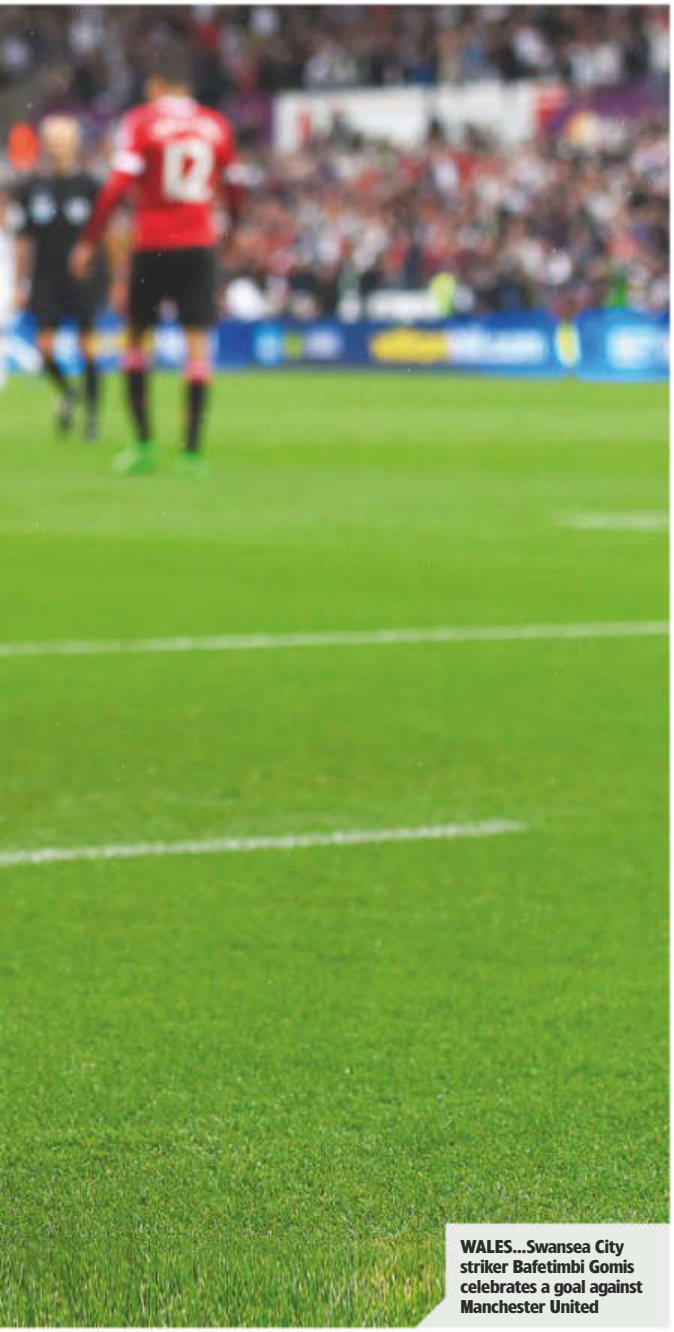
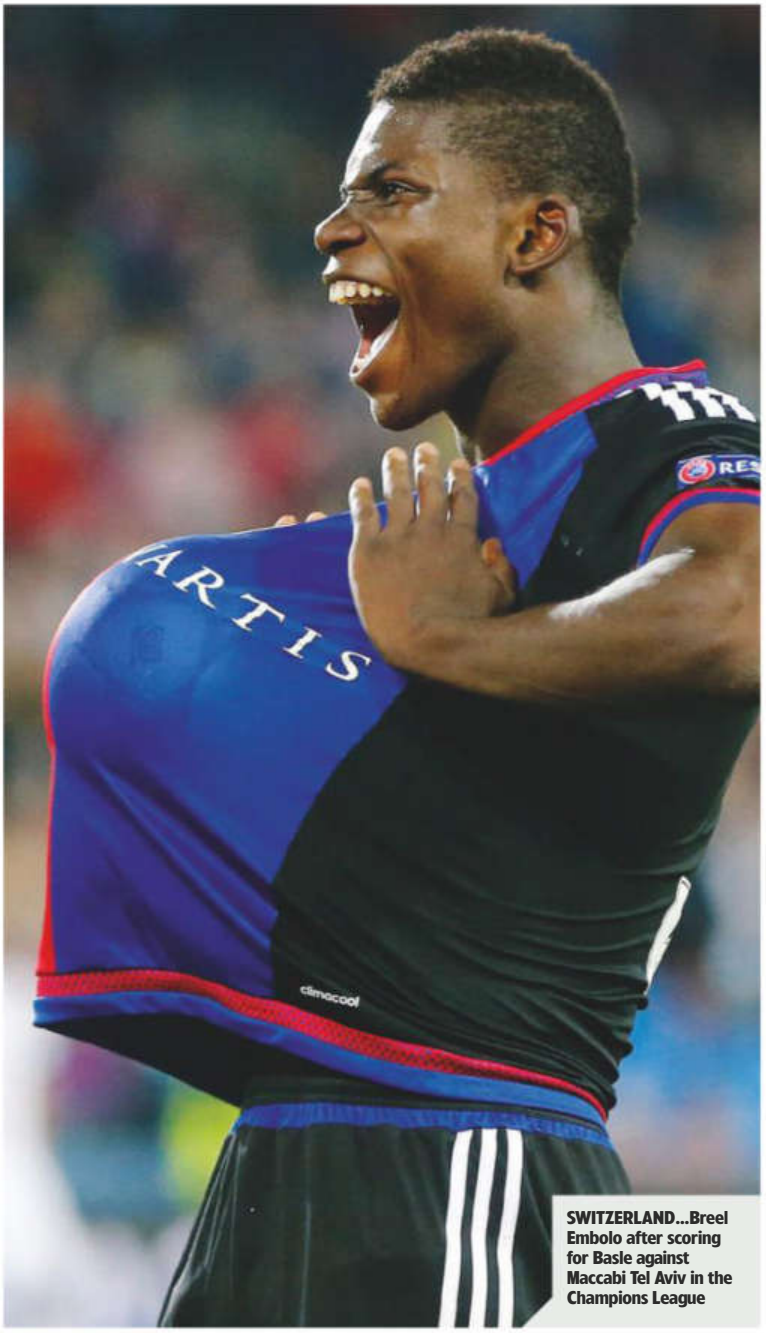
ARGENTINA...Lanus' Gustavo Gomez celebrates his goal against Belgrano in the Sudamericana Cup

FRANCE...Monaco's Jeremy Toulalan (right) and Thiago Motta of Paris Saint-Germain embrace during a game



WALES...Swansea City striker Bafetimbi Gomis celebrates a goal against Manchester United



SWITZERLAND...Breel Embolo after scoring for Basle against Maccabi Tel Aviv in the Champions League

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FROM THE EDITOR

It should have come as no surprise that Premier League clubs spent more money in this summer's transfer market than those from any other league. English teams, enriched by the latest TV deal, want ready-made stars and are prepared to pay extra for them. So far, so predictable.

The likes of Sky (and to a lesser extent, their new rivals at BT Sport) need no encouragement to roll out the old declaration that the Premier League is the best in the world. More money means more quality, surely?

> The Premier League is diverting local fans and TV money away from domestic leagues in Africa and Asia

One of the reasons England's 2018 World Cup bid failed – aside from the obvious allegations of foul play – was the use of the Premier League to sell the bid to the rest of the world. But many non-European football leaders were not seduced by the Premier League's pulling powers.

And why should they be? The Premier League has, for some years, recruited the best players from around the world. Now, through increasingly valuable overseas TV deals, the Premier League is diverting local fans and TV money away from domestic leagues in Africa and Asia.

It has created a growing imbalance between England and the rest of the world. Sooner or later, for the good of the game, the process will have to be reversed.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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8. Centennial Copa America in doubt ..... page 88
9. Messi wins Best Player in Europe award ..... page 10
10. A-League kicks off in Australia ..... page 90

Unanimous...Lionel Messi received 49 of the 54 votes

"Van Gaal is rubbish. Let's hope people in England come to realise that's he's a bad person who treats his players poorly"

Real Madrid and Mexico legend Hugo Sanchez (right) is no fan of the Manchester United manager

SPAIN

Messi named UEFA's Best Player in Europe

Lionel Messi's breathtaking 2014-15 season with Barcelona was recognised by European governing body UEFA when it named him as winner of the 2015 Best Player in Europe award.

Messi won a live poll held during the Champions League group stage draw in Monaco and became the first player to win the award for a second time.

He received 49 votes from the panel of journalists from UEFA's 54 member countries. His Barcelona team-mate Luis Suarez received three votes, with two for Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo.

Messi, Ronaldo and Suarez were the three shortlisted players for the 2015 award, having previously been included in an initial 10-man list that also contained Gianluigi Buffon, Neymar, Eden Hazard, Andrea Pirlo, Arturo Vidal, Carlos Tevez and Paul Pogba.

Award...UEFA president Michel Platini presents the trophy

Messi played a key role in his club's treble of Champions League, Liga and Spanish Cup victories. He ended last season with 58 goals in all competitions and then added two more in Barcelona's 5-4 victory over Europa League winners Sevilla in the UEFA Super Cup.

Messi was the inaugural prize winner in 2011, and was followed by Andres Iniesta (2012), Franck Ribery (2013) and Cristiano Ronaldo (2014).

HEROES & VILLAINS

ALEXIS SANCHEZ

Arsenal's Chilean striker sent two lorries packed with water, first-aid equipment and supplies to help residents of the town of Tocopilla in his homeland after the area was severely affected by torrential storms.

ASTANA

Beat APOEL of Cyprus became the first Kazakh side to reach the group stage of the Champions League. Nemanja Maksimovic's 84th-minute equaliser on the night saw the away side go through 2-1 on aggregate.

BORUSSIA DORTMUND FANS

While some supporters turn their nose up at the Europa League qualifiers, 65,190 were there to see Wolfsberger of Austria, with 64,200 watching the game against Odd of Norway. Dortmund will now almost certainly beat Schalke's record of 53,123 for a Europa League group-stage fixture.

ARITZ ADURIZ

The Athletic Bilbao forward scored a 15-minute hat-trick in the first leg of the Spanish Super Cup as his side beat Barcelona 4-0 at the San Mames Stadium. In so doing he became the first player since Diego Forlan – 11 years ago – to score three goals in a game against Barcelona.

Hat-trick...Aritz Aduriz of Athletic Bilbao

Brawl...Paulo Wanchope (right) fights with a steward

PAULO WANCHOPE

Forced to resign as national coach of Costa Rica after getting involved in a brawl with a steward during an under-23 Olympic qualifier against Panama. "He denied me access even though I had accreditation," said the 39-year-old. "I decided to open the gate myself, then I was pushed by the steward who was there and I pushed him back."

JOSE MOURINHO

The Chelsea manager called first-team doctor Eva Carneiro "naive" for treating Eden Hazard in stoppage time during a 2-2 draw with Swansea City when his side were down to 10 men.

Row...Jose Mourinho and Eva Carneiro (behind, seated)

OLIMPIA

The Paraguayan club were ordered to pay compensation to Sebastian Ariosa after his contract was cancelled while he was receiving treatment for cancer. The 30-year-old Uruguayan defender has now recovered and resumed his career with Uruguayan side Defensor Sporting.

BENJAMIN LECOMTE

Lorient's goalkeeper was sent off after just 39 seconds in the home game against Saint-Etienne. It was the fastest dismissal in Ligue 1 since the 2006-07 season.

"Everyone in the team works very hard for each other. It's one of our big qualities"

Cook Islands' coach Drew Sherman after his side beat Tonga 3-0 for a first-ever World Cup qualifying victory

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/YPtdUH

1 MARTIN HANSEN
Den Haag v PSV
The Den Haag keeper comes up for a late free-kick and flicks a back-heeled volley low into the bottom corner.

2 TIMM GOLLEY
FSV Frankfurt v Greuther Furth
Goes on a run which leaves two defenders in his wake before lobbing the keeper with the outside of his boot in the German second tier.

3 MARCOS ALONSO
Fiorentina v Milan
Left-footed free-kick from 25 yards that goes in off the crossbar.

4 ESPEN RUUD
Odd v Borussia Dortmund
A pile-driver of a free-kick for his Norwegian club in the Europa League.

5 FEDERICO LERTORA
Arsenal v Independiente
Following a free-kick, he cushions the ball with his head before volleying home in the Sudamericana Cup.

6 MEMPHIS DEPAY
Manchester United v Club Brugge
Set up by a defence-splitting pass from team-mate Wayne Rooney, United's Dutch summer signing from PSV cuts inside and hits an unstoppable shot into the far corner. It is the 21-year-old's second goal of the game and helps to seal his side's place in the group stage of the Champions League.

WINNERS

VALUR
Became the first team to qualify for the 2016-17 season in Europe by beating KR 2-0 to win the Icelandic Cup.

DANI ALVES
Barcelona's 5-4 victory over Sevilla in the UEFA Super Cup gave the 32-year-old Brazilian his ninth European title – a feat bettered only by Paolo Maldini's 10.

SPAIN
The first nation to have five teams in the Champions League group stage: Valencia, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atletico Madrid and Sevilla.

ES SETIF
The reigning holders were knocked out of the CAF Champions League at the group stage as they lost 3-0 to USM Alger.

KANO PILLARS
Lost at home in the Nigerian Premier League for the first time in 12 years when beaten 2-1 by Nasarawa United.

JUVENTUS
The Italian champions lost their opening two games of a Serie A campaign for the first time in their history.

LOSERS

"I'm sure the players don't notice the difference"

Real Madrid groundsman Paul Burgess oversees the first hybrid playing surface in the history of the Bernabeu, a mix of natural and artificial grass

Notebook

Highlights from some of our regular on-line contributions

SPAIN

Spanish clubs spent a record €558.3m on players in the transfer market, selling €401.2m worth, even though for once it was not Real Madrid and Barcelona who acted as the motors behind the market.

Atletico Madrid and Valencia both spent more on signings in absolute terms, and Valencia were even the biggest net spenders. However, their figures need to be treated carefully as the €86.5m net (€137m total) includes deals for Rodrigo (€30m), Alvaro Negredo (€28m) and Andre Gomes (€15m) which were done a year ago but paid for this summer.

Atletico may have done the best business, spending €126m but at a net cost of a little over €5m. The sales of Arda Turan (€41m), Mario Mandzukic (€19m), Toby Alderweireld (€16m), Miranda (€15m), Mario Suarez (€10m), Raul Garcia (€10m) and Raul Jimenez (€9m) have enabled them to reshape their squad. Jackson Martinez, Luciano Vietto and Filipe Luis are among seven signings, while Oliver Torres has returned from Porto.

"We have more versatility now," said captain Gabi, and this may well be the best squad Atletico have ever had. A 3-0 win at Sevilla, where the home side had been beaten just once in over a year, was greeted by most as a sign that they are to be taken seriously this season.

Sid Lowe

Impressive... Atletico Madrid celebrate winning away to Sevilla

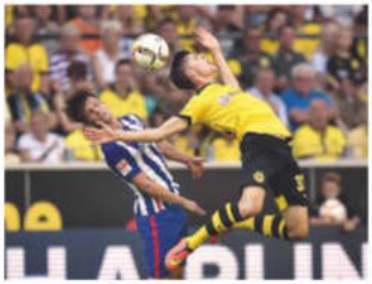
GERMANY

In a perfect start to the season – three games, nine points and an 11:1 goal-difference – Thomas Tuchel's Borussia Dortmund have looked the most co-ordinated unit in the country. And within that well-oiled machine, no one has impressed more than 19-year-old defensive midfielder Julian Weigl.

Bought this summer from 1860 Munich, Weigl had been expected to start the campaign on the Westfalen bench. But thanks to a string of excellent displays in pre-season, he now finds himself an automatic starter. Such has been the teenager's composure that the much more experienced Sven Bender and Gonzalo Castro have been relegated to understudy duty.

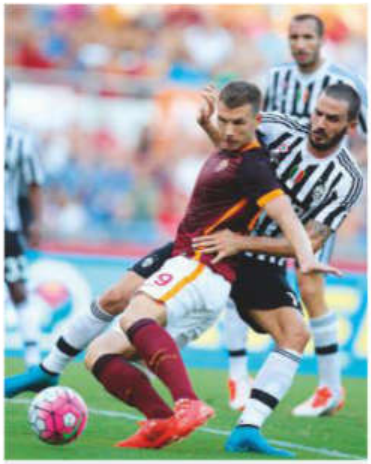
"Julian is a really diligent learner," says Tuchel. "He looks to stretch himself every day in training."

Nick Bidwell



Starter...Borussia Dortmund's Julian Weigl (right)

Dominant...Roma's Edin Dzeko (left)



ITALY

No one can accuse this season's Serie A championship of getting off to a dull start, and for those watching Roma's 2-1 destruction of reigning champions Juventus at the Olimpico in Rome it was one of those "pinch-me-is-this-really-happening" moments.

It was not just the fact that the side which three months ago gave Barcelona a fright in the Champions League Final were beaten by rivals Roma; it was more the overwhelming, most non-Juve look to the defeat.

By the standards set during four seasons of Serie A dominance, this was a shocking defeat.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusions to be drawn concern the modern "mind game" that is professional football.

Roma, with new personnel on board, seem to have laid the ghost of that 7-1 drubbing by Bayern Munich in last year's Champions League. They looked much more like Rudi Garcia's Roma of two seasons back: sharp, hungry and thinking on their feet.

In contrast, Juve looked like they had spent the summer reading too many good reports about themselves.

Paddy Agnew

Weekly notes from Brazil, Spain, Germany and Italy at **worldsoccer.com**

"There's absolutely no point me telling you what he eats or how he dresses. If he behaves, he'll play"

Milan coach Sinisa Mihajlovic quickly tires of press questions about returning striker Mario Balotelli

Headliner

Lionel Messi

Decade of caps for Argentina but debate still rages over his global status

Lionel Messi has now been a senior international player for over a decade, with his Argentina debut coming against Hungary on August 17, 2005. That, however, was not an occasion on which he can look back with a great deal of pleasure.

Just turned 18, he was unleashed as a second-half substitute and was straight into the action. After just two minutes he launched himself on one of those characteristic runs, with the ball tied to his left foot. But when an opponent grabbed hold of him, dragging him back, Messi fought to free himself and was absurdly sent off for throwing an elbow.

Dragging Messi back in recent times has been his lack of a senior international title. He could hardly have come closer, carrying Argentina to narrow defeat in last year's World Cup Final, and then losing out to Chile in a shoot-out in the Final of this year's Copa America.

Forty-six goals from 103 caps is a magnificent record, with 29 of them coming in the last 40 games as captain. But the lack of silverware with his country is always brought up in every discussion about his place in the all-time pantheon.

The great Tostao, Brazil's 1970 World Cup winner, is in no doubt that his attacking partner Pele was the best ever. He concedes Messi is better at setting up the play, but believes he "lacks the personal transformation, the fury that Pele and other superstars had in big games and in the greatest difficulties. Pele was like a cornered animal, uptight when unable to do what he liked and what he wanted. He would try other solutions".

> "[Messi] lacks the personal transformation, the fury that Pele and other superstars had in big games"
>
> 1970 World Cup winner Tostao

It is an interesting psychological analysis. Messi is clearly a quieter, less demonstrative figure than Pele or Diego Maradona. "He is not self-sufficient," says Tostao. "He does not have the absolute lack of modesty which [renowned Brazilian writer] Nelson Rodrigues used to say was Pele's greatest quality."

Messi, then, is a player for whom the collective context is all important. This, in essence, is Tostao's argument. He cites a moment in the Copa America Final, in the last minute of normal time, when Messi at last managed to elude his markers before scampering to the edge of the area, where he slipped a pass to Ezequiel Lavezzi on the left. Lavezzi squared, but Gonzalo Higuain arrived at the far post a fraction of a second too late to steer the ball home.

Tostao calls Messi's choice of move "correct", but adds: "The other option, to try and complete the move on his own, is what he should have done. Messi plays with Argentina as he does for Barcelona. A virtue in his club side, choosing the moment to go for the solo move, is a defect with his country, because it makes him trust too much in the collective game."

This is also fascinating, but perhaps a little unfair. It just so happened that, at this moment, his attacking partners were Lavezzi and Higuain. Angel Di Maria had pulled up injured and Sergio Aguero had been substituted, almost certainly an error. But a collective context where Messi is partnered by a fit-and-firing Di Maria and Aguero is not radically different from the one he plays in every week for Barcelona.

There is, though, a substantial difference in the context of the team as a whole. Tostao may well argue that "Messi plays with Argentina as he does for Barcelona", but it cannot be argued Barcelona play as Argentina do. There are fundamental differences – the main one being in the positioning of the defensive line.

Barcelona press to win the ball back as soon as they have lost it, with the back four playing high up the field. Argentina's current crop of centre-backs lack the pace to do anything similar, and so the line tends to drop much deeper. This obviously has implications on the way Messi plays.

When Argentina win back possession they are often much further from goal than Barcelona. Messi has a much greater area of the pitch to cover – which helps explain the end-of-season burn-out he seemed to be suffering during the World Cup and in the Final of the Copa America.

Tim Vickery

So near, yet so far...Lionel Messi's lack of silverware with Argentina will always count against him with some critics

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Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Corner trick poses another technology problem

Foiled...Brazil's Dani Alves spotted Holland's corner trick at the 2010 World Cup

During the 2010 World Cup, Holland tried to pull off a trick play against Brazil. Arjen Robben walked over to take a corner but then walked away, apparently leaving the kick for someone else to take. The trick was that he had in fact played the ball, meaning that, technically, the corner kick had been taken and the next Dutch player could now play the ball as many times as he liked, even dribble it towards goal.

The Brazilians spotted the deception at once and a player raced over to the corner flag to stop the move.

In a recent MLS game, Chicago Fire's players were not so alert. When New York Red Bulls were awarded a corner, Lloyd Sam wandered over to take it and played the ball within the arc and then ran off, leaving the ball still within the arc. Sacha Kljestan then strolled over, ostensibly to take the corner, but he proceeded to dribble towards goal. His pass found a team-mate, who scored. Legitimate goal said the officials.

What happened next was surprising. As the game went on, the TV broadcaster got in touch with the MLS referee overseers at the Professional Referee Organization (PRO) for their opinion. PRO said the goal should not have counted because Sam had clearly played the ball more than once – he had given it at least three prods or pokes – which, if he is taking the corner kick, he is not allowed to do. One touch is all that is allowed, so the move should have been ruled out even before Kljestan appeared on the scene.

The game was still going on when the TV people informed viewers of the PRO verdict – telling the Chicago crowd, in effect, that the referee they were watching had allowed an illegal goal to be scored against their team. It was probably just as well that Chicago were leading 3-2 by this time and went on to win by that score.

> Referees should adopt an official set of signals that let everyone know what they are doing

So here was PRO publicly correcting one of its own refs during a game. PRO later claimed they were "clarifying rather than correcting", which does not sound like a distinction that the referee in question would appreciate.

This is a trick move that really needs a degree of referee complicity. As Kljestan approached the ball, he was seen to be saying something to the assistant referee. Whatever Kljestan said – and he could only have been seeking assurance that the ball was live and could be dribbled – the assistant referee made no objection.

The assistant referee was clearly involved in the trickery. That should not happen, and it need not happen.

I have suggested repeatedly over the past decades that referees should adopt an official set of signals that let everyone know what they are doing. There is already a signal that referees use: both arms stretched forward to indicate "advantage; play on".

In the absence of a whistle from the referee – not needed at corner kicks, say the rules – surely it makes sense for the ref to use that "play on" signal to indicate the moment at which the ball is in play. In the incident under discussion, that would have been when Sam first played the ball (overlooking for the moment that he illegally played it more than once). As soon as the ref has made his signal, all the players should now know what is going on. The signal gets rid of the implication that the referee is helping the trickery, means the chicanery is unlikely to succeed and as a result the sport would be none the worse for it.

A larger question mark hangs over the advisability of PRO making "live" judgments on its referees. In this case it took about half an hour for PRO's opinion to be made public. But why the delay? Why should not PRO initiate the referee himself during a game. Why tell the broadcasters - who in this case made a hash of explaining the move, claiming that it "worked to perfection" when in fact it was invalid – and not the referee? And assuming the guys at PRO headquarters are really alert, why not tell the referee when there's still time to correct a bad decision?

But that sounds like reducing the referee to a mere cipher, with the real officiating being done at PRO HQ – and I don't think anyone is going to advocate that. The alternative is for PRO to withhold key information until the game is over – which, in this age of transparency and almost unlimited instant information flow, is also unsatisfactory.

Another technology problem for FIFA and IFAB to grapple with. WS

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THE INSIDER

There's little sign of a football recession

Unhappy...Tony Pulis (far left) and Jose Mourinho

The figures generated after the close of the recent summer transfer window were staggering. Premier League clubs spent a record £870million, with almost £600m of that going on new players from outside English football. At the highest level, sport in general – and football in particular – continues to defy the financial uncertainty and the cloud of "austerity" which hovers over economies far and wide.

It's stretching an analogy too far to suggest that sport fiddles while Rome burns, but there is no sign of recession.

FIFA will generate ever-increasing revenues from future World Cups and is thus happily able to promise a greater share-out to the clubs who supply the players. Similarly in Europe, UEFA rolls up its income from the Champions League and Europa League – and has increased the share-out ratio to clubs in the secondary competition without affecting the riches on offer to the Madrids, Manchesters and Barcelonas.

Hence the most curious aspect of the latest Premier League transfer-window record was that no one actually questioned the amount of money being spent on players – including the fees for agents and the far greater sums heading out of the English game.

Instead, the only complaints came from Jose Mourinho and Tony Pulis, managers of Chelsea and West Bromwich Albion, who were grousing that the window should be closed before the start of the season because the overlapping three weeks creates uncertainty in the dressing room and on the training ground.

> No one actually questioned the amount of money being spent on players

The obvious complication here is that almost every country starts its league on a different date. England starts in early August because the FA Cup and League Cup have to be squeezed in, as well as the international breaks. Some countries start even earlier to allow for the winter break, while others such as Italy and Spain start later.

Given that agreement on a standardised deadline would be impossible, the only alternative would be for each country to set its own date. But an England deadline of, say, August 7 would not stop Real Madrid or Barcelona buying someone from Manchester United – to take a random example – before the end of the Spanish window. A country could bar both imports and exports, but then players' lawyers could complain about unlawful restrictions on the right to work.

Of course, the game may come to that sooner or later in any case as FIFPro, the international players' union, is firmly opposed to the current operation of the transfer system.

Meanwhile, the spending will go on, and next year the Premier League's massive new TV deal will surely see the £1billion barrier broken. And along with that, the imbalance between football's rich and poor – as former FIFA bidder Jerome Champagne has observed – will grow damagingly ever wider.

Competition is football's lifeblood. Remove that and, as the Americans term it, the game will be left with "franchises" rather than clubs.

Platini's dilemma

Away from the twists and turns of FIFA, Michel Platini is wrestling with a practical dilemma ahead of Euro 2016 in France.

The Frenchman is as firm a critic of goal-line technology (GLT) as he is an advocate of the five-referee system, with goal-line additional assistant referees. However, the success of GLT at successive FIFA world championships, as well as in England, has persuaded him to allow a study into whether and how to marry both systems at Euro 2016.

Platini may be riding two horses of his own by then. If he is elected FIFA president, UEFA will not be able to choose his presidential successor until after Euro 2016. WS

Keen...Michel Platini is a fan of the five-referee system

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Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

United's transfer woes put Van Gaal in the line of fire

For so many years there could be no doubt: Manchester United were indisputably the richest, most powerful and most influential football club in England.

Now? Well, who can argue against the truth that they have been overtaken by Chelsea and the noisy neighbours of Manchester City?

The Premier League tables have confirmed United's decline on the field since the retirement of their long-serving manager Alex Ferguson.

Shockingly, the evidence is even more damning from the club's chaotic escapades in recent summer transfer markets; tales of woe which have left the club diminished in status and reputation as well as trophy success.

During the 2013 window United dithered and dallied, and then failed to sign any of their major targets, save for Marouane Fellaini in what was a last-ditch, panic-strewn purchase on deadline day.

Last year appeared to be more encouraging, superficially at least, with the British record capture of Angel Di Maria for £59.7million. But the Argentinian soon fell out with United boss Louis Van Gaal and was moved on to Paris Saint-Germain recently for £44m.

It was a hefty financial loss – as well as a damaging saga that could hardly inspire others to move to Old Trafford.

United always crave a superstar signing, a showbiz spectacular to boost their image and self-regard. They have done so for three summer transfer windows, and this time they were linked with Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale, Neymar and Thomas Muller among others. Yet none has arrived, nor ever seemed likely to.

This summer's transfer torment has been United's worst ever, with the club made to look foolish by the farcical failure, apparently by two minutes, to complete the sale of goalkeeper David De Gea to Real Madrid on deadline day at the end of August.

De Gea's exit had been well signposted, with the player left out of early season games after he indicated his personal wish to join Real. The deal was agreed with Madrid, but still it faltered, with the Spanish giants explicitly blaming Manchester United in a robust statement, and United vehemently defending themselves.

Torment...David De Gea and Louis Van Gaal

Maybe the whole unvarnished truth of the matter will never fully be known. But nobody could deny it was a mess for the powerbrokers of Old Trafford who had allowed De Gea's contract to run down to its final year.

> With both Carlo Ancelotti and Jurgen Klopp hovering in the background, there are options for United

Instead of persuading an established footballing superstar to join them, United's major signings were two youngsters: Memphis Depay from PSV, who is 21, and, in a last-gasp deal, 19-year-old Anthony Martial from Monaco.

The latter's deal was a record £36m for a teenager, with the figure rising as high as £58m based on future success – numbers that are astonishing for raw talent.

If Martial turns out to be as remarkable a player as Ronaldo, who was also signed as a relatively unheralded teenager by United, this transfer will be viewed more than kindly by history. But major gambles such as this fail more often than they succeed, and the perception all round was one of a fading empire once again settling for second best in hectic fashion.

With hindsight, it is clear that Ferguson's authority and genius was papering over the cracks for at least a couple of years before his exit. Supporters then were moaning about the lack of world-class players, but the team were still winning the Premier League title.

The initial fall guy for United's decline was Ferguson's successor, David Moyes, yet much of the blame also has to lie with executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward, the man responsible for transfer deals.

Now it is Van Gaal as manager, and he will be the man in the firing line rather than the behind-the-scenes powerbroker if transfer chaos proves damaging once more.

With both Carlo Ancelotti and Jurgen Klopp hovering in the background right now as unattached managers of the highest quality, there are options for Manchester United.

It may prove far easier to sign a big-name boss than a superstar player. WS

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"Sad how I can't say exactly how the club has treated me, but I can officially say I will never play [for chairman] Jeremy Peace"

West Bromwich Albion striker Saido Berahino appears to go on strike after a move to Tottenham Hotspur failed to materialise

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

EUROPE

Swedish coach **HANS BACKE** will take charge of Finland's national team at the start of next year. He replaces Mixu Paatelainen, who was sacked in June after four successive defeats in the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign.

Italian World Cup-winner **GENNARO GATTUSO** was appointed coach of third-tier side Pisa.

In charge...Michel has taken over as coach of Marseille

Marseille turn to Michel

Former Spain midfielder **MICHEL** was appointed coach of Marseille. The 52-year-old, who was sacked by Greek champions Olympiakos in January, replaced Marcelo Bielsa who resigned after an opening-day defeat in Ligue 1.

Former Bayer Leverkusen coach **SAMI HYYPIA** took over from Urs Meier as boss of Swiss Super League side Zurich.

Cypriot side APOEL parted company with Portuguese coach Domingos Paciencia and brought in **TEMURI KETSBAIA** after they lost in the Champions League play-offs.

Botev Plovdiv replaced Petar Penchev with Slovene coach **ERMIN SILJAK** after they were thrashed 6-0 by promoted Montana in their second game of the new Bulgarian season.

Former Sunderland boss **RICKY SBRAGIA** was promoted from the Scotland under-19 set-up to become coach of their under-21 side.

SOUTH AMERICA

Vasco da Gama appointed their third coach of the year when **JORGINHO** replaced Celso Roth after they lost 1-0 at home to Coritiba. Former Brazil boss **MANO MENEZES** replaced Vanderlei Luxemburgo in charge of Cruzeiro.

JULIO CESAR BALDIVIESO, who played for Bolivia at the 1994 World Cup, was appointed coach of the national side.

Swiss role...Sami Hyypia is coach of Zurich

Huracan central defender **EDUARDO DOMINGUEZ**, 36, retired and took over as coach of the Argentinian club from Nestor Apuzzo, who left after a 3-0 defeat by Nueva Chicago.

CONCACAF

PAKO AYESTARAN, who won the first-ever Israeli treble with Maccabi Tel Aviv last season, took over from Pedro Caixinha as boss of defending Liga MX champions Santos Laguna.

Tigres' **RICARDO FERRETTI** took charge of Mexico on an interim basis, while **OSCAR RAMIREZ** replaced Paulo Wanchope as coach of Costa Rica and **JORGE RODRIGUEZ** took over from Albert Rocha with El Salvador.

MLS side Real Salt Lake signed Boca Juniors' **JUAN MANUEL MARTINEZ**, who was Argentina's footballer of the year in 2010 along with Barcelona's Lionel Messi.

One year...Bert Van Marwijk joins Saudi Arabia

Former Italy international defender **ALESSANDRO NESTA** was appointed coach of newly formed NASL club side Miami, who are part-owned by his former Milan team-mate Paolo Maldini.

ASIA

BERT VAN MARWIJK, who took Holland to the 2010 World Cup Final, took charge of Saudi Arabia on a one-year contract.

Norwegian full-back **JOHN ARNE RIISE** joined Indian Super League side Delhi Dynamos after being released by Cypriot club APOEL. He joins ex-France winger **FLORENT MALOUDA** at the club.

Caretaker...Ricardo Ferretti is interim Mexico boss

"It's ridiculous to take someone on the last day of August"

Montpellier president Laurent Nicollin...a few days before doing just that and signing Chad forward Rodrigue Ninga from Mangasport of Gabon

Appointments, sackings and loans

EUROPE

Defending Bulgarian champions Ludogorets sacked Portuguese coach **BRUNO RIBEIRO** less than three months after his appointment.

VIKTOR GONCHARENKO quit as coach of Russian side Ural Sverdlovsk Oblast after just two months in charge.

ULRICH FORTE was sacked by Swiss Super League side Young Boys after they were thrashed 7-1 on aggregate in the Champions League qualifiers by Monaco.

Roma's 33-year-old left-back **FEDERICO BALZARETTI**, who won 16 caps for Italy and played at Euro 2012, retired due to a long-standing groin injury.

SOUTH AMERICA

Brazilian side Internacional sacked Uruguayan coach **DIEGO AGUIRRE**.

MATIAS ALMEYDA resigned as coach of Argentinian side Banfield.

CONCACAF

Montreal Impact sacked coach **FRANK KLOPAS** after they lost 2-1 to fellow Canadian club Toronto in MLS.

AFRICA

Egypt striker **AMR ZAKI**, who was an African Nations Cup winner in 2006 and 2008, announced his retirement at the age of 32.

Former Marseille boss **JOSE ANIGO** quit as coach of Esperance – after just seven matches in charge of the Tunisian side – following their exit from the African Confederation Cup.

Quit...Federico Balzaretti will join Roma's staff

TOP SUMMER 2015 TRANSFERS (€11M AND OVER)

Player	£m
Kevin De Bruyne Wolfsburg to Manchester City	74
Raheem Sterling Liverpool to Manchester City	68
Angel Di Maria Manchester United to Paris Saint-Germain	63
Anthony Martial Monaco to Manchester United	49
Christian Benteke Aston Villa to Liverpool	46.5
Nicolas Otamendi Valencia to Manchester City	44.6
Roberto Firmino Hoffenheim to Liverpool	41
Arturo Vidal Juventus to Bayern Munich	37
Julian Draxler Schalke to Wolfsburg	36
Mateo Kovacic Internazionale to Real Madrid	35
Jackson Martinez Porto to Atletico Madrid	35
Morgan Schneiderlin Southampton to Manchester United	35
Arda Turan Atletico Madrid to Barcelona	34
Paulo Dybala Palermo to Juventus	32
Danilo Porto to Real Madrid	31.5
Carlos Bacca Sevilla to Milan	30
Douglas Costa Shakhtar Donetsk to Bayern Munich	30
Geoffrey Kondogbia Monaco to Inter	30
Rodrigo Benfica to Valencia	30
Son Heung-min Bayer Leverkusen to Tottenham Hotspur	30
Alvaro Negredo Manchester City to Valencia	28
Memphis Depay PSV to Manchester United	27.5
Pedro Barcelona to Chelsea	27
Alex Sandro Porto to Juventus	26
Aymen Abdennour Monaco to Valencia	25
Alessio Romagnoli Roma to Milan	25
Layvin Kurzawa Monaco to PSG	25
Stefan Savic Fiorentina to Atletico Madrid	25
Baba Rahman Augsburg to Chelsea	20
Andrea Bertolacci Roma to Milan	20
Yannick Ferreira Carrasco Monaco to Atletico Madrid	20
Giannelli Imbula Marseille to Porto	20
Luciano Vietto Villarreal to Atletico Madrid	20
Georginio Wijnaldum PSV Eindhoven to Newcastle	20
Mario Mandzukic Atletico Madrid to Juventus	19
Aleksandar Mitrovic Anderlecht to Newcastle United	18.4
Matteo Darmian Torino to Man United	18
Florian Thauvin Marseille to Newcastle Utd	18
Simone Zaza Sassuolo to Juventus	18
Nathaniel Clyne Southampton to Liverpool	17.8
Salomon Rondon Zenit to West Bromwich Albion	17
Xherdan Shaqiri Inter to Stoke City	17
Aleix Vidal Sevilla to Barcelona	17
Toby Alderweireld Atletico Madrid to Tottenham Hotspur	16
Filipe Luis Chelsea to Atletico Madrid	16
Ivan Perisic Wolfsburg to Internazionale	16
Roberto Soldado Tottenham Hotspur to Villarreal	16
Virgil Van Dijk Celtic to Southampton	15.7
Ivan Cavaleiro Benfica to Monaco	15
Andre Gomes Benfica to Valencia	15
Asier Illaremendi Real Madrid to Real Sociedad	15
Miranda Atletico Madrid to Internazionale	15
Dmitri Payet Marseille to West Ham Utd	15
Mario Suarez Atletico Madrid to Fiorentina	15
Clinton Njie Lyon to Tottenham Hotspur	14.1
Petr Cech Chelsea to Arsenal	14
Adama Traore Lille to Monaco	14
Yohan Cabaye PSG to Crystal Palace	13.9
Charles Aranguiz Internacional to Bayer Leverkusen	13
Jordan Ayew Lorient to Aston Villa	12
Sergi Darder Malaga to Lyon	12
Ramiro Funes Mori River Plate to Everton	12
Johannes Geis Mainz to Schalke	12
Javier Hernandez Manchester United to Bayer Leverkusen	12
Max Kruse Borussia Monchengladbach to Wolfsburg	12
Rony Lopes Manchester City to Monaco	12
Chancel Mbemba Anderlecht to Newcastle United	12
Allan Udinese to Napoli	11.5
Fabian Delph Aston Villa to Manchester City	11.5
Jeremain Lens Dynamo Kiev to Sunderland	11.4
James Chester Hull City to West Brom	11.3
Jordan Amavi Lille to Aston Villa	11
Asmir Begovic Stoke City to Chelsea	11
Gonzalo Castro Bayer Leverkusen to Borussia Dortmund	11
Hernanes Internazionale to Juventus	11
Kevin Kampl Borussia Dortmund to Bayer Leverkusen	11
Tyrone Mings Ipswich to Bournemouth	11
Angelo Ogbonna Juventus to West Ham	11
Shinji Okazaki Mainz to Leicester City	11

Moving...De Bruyne (above); Martial (below); Draxler and Dante (bottom)

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

There's nothing Special about Chelsea this term

Schadenfreude, the German word which means "pleasure in others' misfortunes", has doubtless been initiated in the recent reversals of Jose Mourinho and Chelsea.

Last season Chelsea romped away with the Premier League, but one felt at the time that the success was as much thanks to the mediocrity of the challengers as to their own prowess; a feeling emphasised by the dire capitulation to a 10-man Paris Saint-Germain in the European Cup at Stamford Bridge.

Watching Chelsea lose there to an inspired Crystal Palace – and this after the initial Community Shield defeat by a previously unsuccessful Arsenal, followed by a home draw with Swansea City and a loss at Manchester City – one viewed a team in palpable decline.

As for Mourinho himself, his behaviour to the club's female doctor and her colleague seemed indefensible. Not only did they have every right to come onto the field, however desperately late in that game it was, to treat the prone Eden Hazard, it was their bounded duty. It was the referee himself who had beckoned them on, and to berate and demote them was no better than a petulant reaction – one which should ideally have been followed by immediate reinstatement.

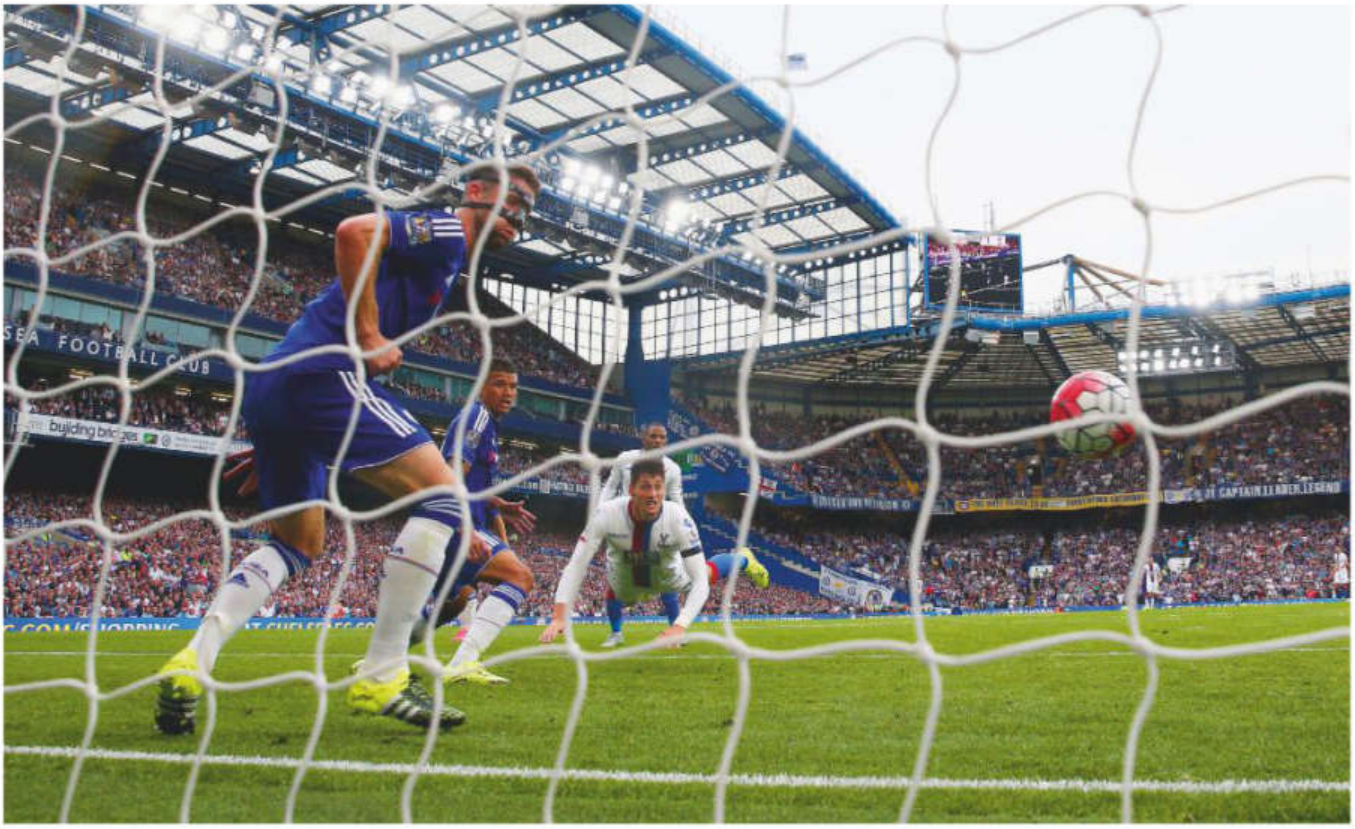
No manager can control or always be held responsible for the failings of certain key players. Thus Mourinho could hardly have bargained for the sudden vulnerability of his right-back Branislav Ivanovic, such a force in previous seasons both in defence and attack. Nor that of Hazard himself, who was an ineffectual figure on the left flank against Palace.

> Watching Chelsea lose to Crystal Palace one viewed a team in decline

There was some consolation in the vigorous form of the 19-year-old Brazilian striker Kenedy from Fluminense. He had barely arrived in London, yet he looked strong, confident and skilful from the moment he appeared as a substitute.

That Mourinho is one of the outstanding managers of his time is beyond all dispute, but this season, he has hardly seemed the "Special One".

Nor has his team.



Inspired..Joel Ward scores Crystal Palace's winner at Chelsea

Anelka shows promise in India

How intriguing "stormy petrel" Nicolas Anelka has come to rest in India, where at long last what one hopes will be a valid professional league has been installed, with an influx of distinguished veterans.

I have long been bewildered by India's failure to match its prowess in cricket, hockey and even tennis with equal success in football. This when there is huge interest in the game, as indeed that has been for so many years.

Before the last war, when the Middlesex Wanderers, a team made up of leading British amateur players, toured India, vast crowds, sometimes as huge as a hundred thousand, would come to watch them.

And in post-war years there were signs that Indian soccer would take off. In London's 1948 Olympics, the Indian team, though reported to be playing without boots, gave an excellent account of itself, as indeed it did again at the Melbourne Olympics of 1956.

It is to be hoped that the new professional league will do what the Americans have done. Nicknamed initially "The Elephants' Graveyard" for the ageing former stars it imported, over the years it has come to produce plenty of competent, even exceptional, players of its own, even if the last World Cup squad abounded with players developed in Germany, but fathered by American servicemen.

And Anelka? At the age of 36, he is now player-coach at Mumbai City – the latest though probably not the last stage of a flamboyant, explosive career.

Stars...Nicolas Anelka (second left) with Mumbai City team-mates and the club's owner, actor Ranbir Kapoor (centre)

Already a star at 17, he lost patience with Paris Saint-Germain for failing to make him a regular starter, preferring two far more experienced internationals. So, the rules being then what they were, he went to Arsenal for nothing. In time they'd transfer him to Real Madrid for £23million and patronisingly toss PSG half a million.

With him to London, alas, came his two contentious brothers, acting as his agents and constantly fermenting trouble. Of Anelka's splendid talents there was no doubt, but there were constant upheavals.

At one point he accused the two Holland internationals Marc Overmars and Dennis Bergkamp of refusing to pass the ball to him. But on form he could be irresistible, scoring both France goals in a 2-0 victory at Wembley and a third which was wrongly disallowed.

At Real Madrid he initially refused to train and his subsequent English clubs in a roaming career included Liverpool, Chelsea and West Bromwich Albion, where he disgraced himself against West Ham United by giving a notorious anti-Semitic salute, deployed by his friend, an extremist comedian. Anelka insisted he hadn't known what it meant.

In India, he has still managed to show signs of his skills.

All praise to Monk and Swansea

With Manchester United's Louis Van Gaal – when, oh when, are commentators and broadcasters in general going to learn to pronounce his name "Van Harl", when they have no difficulty with "De Hea"? – under siege at Old Trafford, how pleasing to see the success of Swansea City's Garry Monk, who is young, bright, shrewd and actually, miraculously, English!

Already this season he and his team have got the better of both Chelsea and Manchester United. They even beat United without their coruscating Ecuadorian left winger Jefferson Montero. Van Gaal generously praised Monk for his tactics after he had been beaten by him and Swansea for the third consecutive time.

And all praise to Swansea who, while United and others splash immense sums of money on players who may or may not be remotely worth it, acquire as gifted and effective an attacker as the Ghana international Andre Ayew for nothing.

Against United, Ayew was in glorious form, setting up the first goal with a remarkable pass with the outside of his foot, and leaping high to head the second. He is, of course, one of two footballing sons of that refulgent former star Abedi Pele.

Shrewd Swansea. Could one envisage Monk, once a Swansea player himself, as a future England manager?

Bright future...Swansea City manager Garry Monk

Berahino's bind

Why does the vexed case of Saido Berahino and West Bromwich Albion remind me of Tom Finney? Both gifted wingers, Finney surely one of the greatest of all English time, both desirous of leaving their clubs and bettering their lot, both thwarted in their ambition.

The difference being that in Finney's day, the 1940s and 1950s, a player was bound to his club in perpetuity. So when Finney, in the latter 40s, was offered a contract with Italian side Palermo, which would dwarf his meagre maximum wage at Preston, the chairman simply called him in and told him he wasn't going.

Not for sale...Saido Berahino remains at West Brom

The Albion chairman Jeremy Peace has told Berahino, to his outrage, that he cannot join Spurs. This, despite the fact that manager Tony Pulis would seemingly be prepared to let him go. Berahino said he'd never play for Peace again.

Peace insists that Spurs (who deny it) had offered only to pay in instalments over a protracted period.

By contrast with Finney, Berahino has a contract which binds him to his club, but only for its duration. I can understand his frustration but Peace has the law of contract on his side, where in Finney's day, no contract even existed.

He continued working as a plumber.

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eye witness

Paul Gardner reports from New York

USA

Shaky start for NYC

But future still bright for new club

At the beginning of September, New York City FC were not where they were supposed to be and not where many thought they would be. They were not sitting safely in the top half of the MLS Eastern Conference, already assured of a play-off berth.

Not at all. Of the conference's 10 teams, six make the play-offs. But with five of those berths already virtual certainties, NYC were merely one of five teams fighting for the last remaining spot – with the disadvantage that three of those teams had played fewer games.

Peeved...New York City coach Jason Kreis

Things were not looking good. On August 29, NYC played poorly and lost at home to Columbus. After the game, coach Jason Kreis sounded – for the first time in what has been an erratic season – distinctly peeved as he said: "I couldn't be more disappointed. Devastating for us to lose that game. I still think there has to be a glimmer of hope. But at the moment, it's tough to see it."

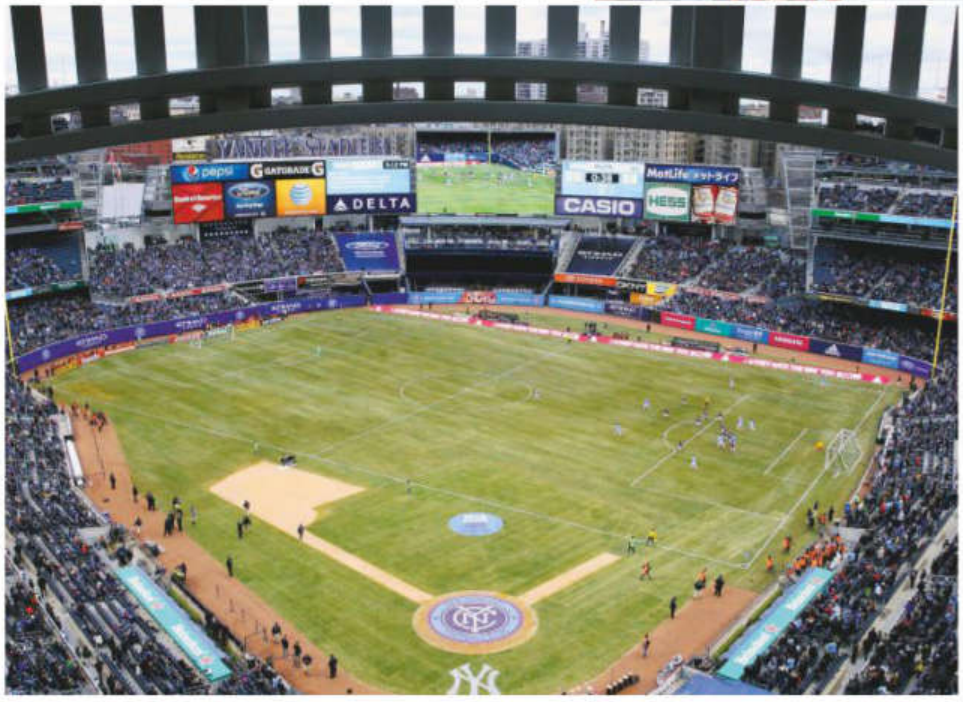
He followed that with a swipe at some of his players, complaining: "I know the coaching staff cares an awful lot about this club and the job we're attempting to do. I'm not so sure all the players do."

That provoked an indignant response from Frank Lampard, who explained: "Managers and players should be emotional after defeats at times. We're not getting the results and the consistency, but for me it's not for the want of trying."

No, the season was not supposed to end with dressing-room bickering. Yet Lampard himself has been a source of controversy from the very beginning. What became known as "Lampardgate" surfaced in December when it was revealed that he was not joining NYC for the start of the 2015 season, as expected, but would instead be playing at Manchester City. Then the shocking news came that Lampard had signed with Manchester City, not with NYC as had been announced. His arrival in New York would have to wait until the end of the English season. NYC FC pleaded for understanding, but to many it looked like deception.

The 34-year-old Lampard eventually joined NYC in July 2015 and promptly got injured in training. By September 1 he had played in just three games and

Old joke...New York Red Bulls fans mock NYC veterans Lampard and Pirlo



Difficult fit...Yankee Stadium only allows for a narrow football pitch for NYCFC's home games

was struggling to make an impact. He looked slow, unfit and, well, just old.

Another major NYC signing, Italy's Andrea Pirlo, was even older at 37, and he too arrived late and struggled to show his worth. The third of NYC's big names, Spain's David Villa, was with the club from the start, and even without a top-class supporting cast he had scored 15 goals after 24 games.

Add to these player problems the disappointment caused by NYC's failure to start work on their own new stadium – indeed, the failure to even find a site for

On target...David Villa scores against New England Revolution

"We're not getting the results and the consistency, but for me it's not for the want of trying" **NYC midfielder Frank Lampard**

one. The club pledged it would build inside the city of New York, but may have to spend several years playing in Yankee Stadium – a splendid modern venue, but one built for baseball, not soccer. Fitting a soccer pitch into the awkward baseball-stadium shape meant one that was only 68 yards wide.

But there was a very bright upside to contemplate: the fervent support the club had received, right from the start. Even as the season looked like ending without a play-off berth, a sell-out crowd of 30,000 showed up for the Columbus game.

A Dickensian motif accompanied the club's first season: not so much *A Tale of Two Cities*, more a tale of two titles – from *Great Expectations* to *Hard Times*. In truth, most of the expectations had been too great, while the hard times were inevitable.

Struggling...Frank Lampard has suffered with injuries in the US

> "I know the coaching staff cares an awful lot about this club...I'm not so sure all the players do"
>
> **NYC coach Jason Kreis**

NYC are, after all, an expansion team; a completely new club, hastily put together as such clubs always are. The base of the squad was made up of players that other MLS clubs were willing to part with, while the vast amounts of money supposedly available from NYC's Manchester City backers were almost irrelevant because of the strict salary cap that MLS imposes.

In their first 13 games, NYC managed just one win, which should have brought reality. But then came a promising spell of nine games that featured five wins and one draw. If hope was born anew, it was really denied by too many inadequate players who struggled to impress in a constantly changing line-up.

Eventually, help arrived from Manchester City with a couple of young loan players in defenders Shay Facey and Angelino. Another youngster, Kwadwo Poku from Ghana, who is a lively attacking force quickly became a crowd favourite. He was needed after the 6ft 3in Slovakian striker Adam Nemec failed to score in any of his first nine games and his desired partnership with Villa never materialised.

Waiting...Andrea Pirlo is yet to light up MLS

For coach Kreis, the major problem was the lack of a dynamic, creative midfielder. His highly successful years coaching at Real Salt Lake owed much to his signing of Argentinian midfielder Javier Morales, who quickly proved to be one of the best players in MLS. But at Yankee Stadium there was no sign of a player of his quality.

The biggest problem for NYC is not player personnel, no one can doubt that they will soon assemble a competitive squad, it is the lack of a stadium that clouds their future. Enthusiastic sell-out crowds of 30,000 deserve a real soccer stadium and the vision of action-packed derby games against New York Red Bulls – who are actually from New Jersey – is an enticing one.

The two clubs met three times this year, with the Bulls winning all three. NYC also suffered an Open Cup loss, on penalties, to the reborn New York Cosmos of the second-tier NASL.

The extraordinary fan support, the growth of the city of New York as a soccer metropolis and the – admittedly still rather uncertain – vision of NYC's gleaming new stadium are reasons enough not to get too upset by the club's shaky first season. WS

Fan favourite...Kwadwo Poku (centre)

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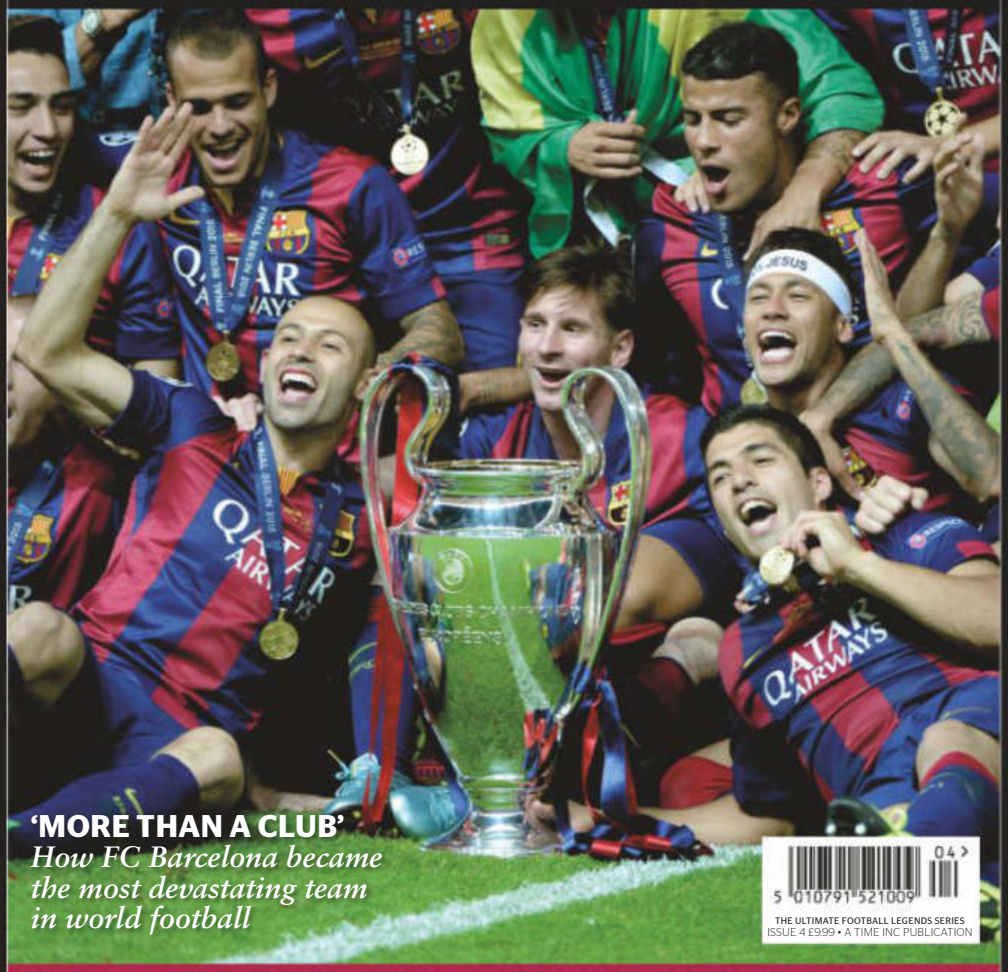

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Steve Menary reports from Kaunas

LITHUANIA

The slow death of a league

Match-fixing and unscrupulous foreign owners are gradually killing A Lyga

The size of the crowd watching Stumbras host Trakai in the Darius & Girenas Stadium in Kaunas says a lot about the state of club football in Lithuania. But not as much as the admission fee.

Supporters are not charged. Instead, there is a box behind the main terrace for donations, which are paltry. Stumbras are the only A Lyga club not to charge, but the lack of effort to monetise the game speaks volumes. There are no kiosks or any match-day programmes.

"Football culture in Lithuania needs to grow up," sighs Valdas Knyzelis, who looks embarrassed at the few hundred fans scattered around the 9,800-capacity stadium that Stumbras share with his club, FBK Kaunas.

Since independence from Russia in 1991, the relationship between Lithuania's clubs and their supporters has been damaged almost beyond repair. In a country where basketball is the most popular sport, football has been undermined by the sort of scandal that sank Knyzelis' own club.

Donations...pay what you want to watch Stumbras

A decade ago, FBK Kaunas were in the midst of a bumper run that saw the club win seven out of eight A Lyga titles with the backing of Vladimir Romanov, who also controlled Scottish side Hearts and two Lithuanian banks, Ukio Bankas and UBIG.

Romanov's banks then went bust, bringing down Hearts and FBK Kaunas. A consortium of local fans, including Knyzelis, reformed FBK and the club that won a record eight domestic league titles are now in the second tier.

Few Lithuanian clubs boast that sort of history; more common is the backstory exemplified by Trakai, who played in this season's Europa League just 10 years after being formed. The club's owner, Ivan Nevoina, insists the A Lyga's problem is "marketing" and that his is a "social project", but that has not stopped him taking Trakai's home games to Vilnius in search of bigger crowds.

Trakai share the LFF Stadium with defending league champions Zalgiris, who – along with FBK – are one of the few Lithuanian clubs still able to boast a section of ultras at home games. However, these days the Zalgiris ultras number just a few hundred and look isolated in a 6,000-capacity stadium that will welcome England for a Euro 2016 qualifier on October 12.

Like FBK, Zalgiris have gone bust and reformed, and this season they look all set to hold off a challenge from Trakai and claim the league title.

Zalgiris have the biggest playing budget in Lithuania, but that is not saying much as bankrolling success in the A Lyga is cheap by most European standards.

UEFA's Financial Fairplay regulations only apply to clubs who turn over more than €5million a year, and no Lithuanian club gets near that figure. A good wage for a player is €1,000 a month, while an annual budget of €500,000 can build a side capable of rapid promotion to the top flight and European qualification.

Top flight...Stumbras (in blue) and Trakai

Those sort of economics attracted many new owners – such as the consortium led by former Russian player Dmitry Baida that took control of Gargzdai-based Banga, whose boom-and-bust tale illustrates just why Lithuanians are losing interest in club football.

From a town with a population of just

> "Football culture in Lithuania needs to grow up"
>
> **FBK Kaunas chairman Valdas Knyzelis**

15,000 people, Banga qualified for the Europa League in 2011-12 and 2014-15, but they were suspected of being involved in match-fixing.

In 2014, the Lithuanian Football Federation (LFF) banned Baida, along with Banga's Russian goalkeeper Soslanbek Arshiyev and Oleg Dmytrenko, a Ukrainian defender playing for Klaipeda-based

Granitas, after an investigation.

The Russians quit and Banga collapsed, leaving the club to restart in the lower leagues with Lithuanian owners.

The LFF were also concerned about links between Granitas, Panevezys-based Ekranas and Latvian club Daugava Riga, with a director, coach and several players having moved between the three clubs. With suspicions aroused, the LFF stopped three players – Dominykas Galkevicius, Tomas Salamanavicius and Rytis Pilotas – from playing at the start of this season.

The trio had signed for Pakruojis-based Kruoja but Galkevicius had previously played for Granitas and Daugava Riga, while Salamanavicius and Pilotas had appeared for Ekranas.

"It's difficult to pick out which players might have been involved in match-fixing," explains a source at the LFF, which officially described the bans as a "preventive measure".

Galkevicius and Salamanavicius were subsequently cleared to play on appeal, while Pilotas didn't appeal and is still banned. Galkevicius has since left Kruoja, but the club remains under investigation after coach Divaldo Alves was suspended by his own management in May 2015. An

Angolan with a Portuguese passport who previously worked in Asia, he only took charge of Kruoja in April.

The LFF's investigation into alleged match-fixing has hindered attempts by Kruoja's owner, Emilijus Junevicius, to sell a club that has attracted interest from as far afield as Hong Kong and Egypt. While a deal has yet to be agreed, it is telling that the prospective buyers are not Russians – as Russians looking for quick success, regardless of the methods or consequences, are all too common in Lithuanian football.

In the last two decades, 20 Lithuanian clubs have vanished completely and Russian money has often been in evidence, from Banga and Granitas – both owned by Russians – to Ekranas who, although owned by Lithuanians, were sponsored by a Russian energy firm before the club collapsed last season.

> "It's difficult to pick out which players might have been involved in match-fixing"
>
> **An official at the Lithuanian Football Federation**

Blaming Russians for match-fixing is too simplistic, but the scale of the problem should not be underestimated. A 2013 survey by the Lithuanian branch of Transparency International (TI) found that one in seven A Lyga players had knowledge of match-fixing.

Initially, TI found the LFF and the basketball authorities were reluctant to admit that a problem existed, but that is gradually changing. The LFF has been working with both UEFA and Interpol, and although the root causes remain, it wants new legislation to make match-fixing a crime.

According to TI's research, players

Ultras..Zalgiris have retained a small but loyal fan base

Euro action...Zalgiris' Egidijus Vaitkunas (right)

LITHUANIA: 2015 A LYGA

1 Atlantas (*Klaipeda*)
Klaipedos Granitas
2 Kruoja (*Pakruojis*)
3 Siauliai
4 Spyris (*Kaunas*)
Stumbras
5 Suduva (*Marijampole*)
6 Trakai
7 Utenis (*Utena*)
8 Zalgiris (*Vilnius*)

ATLANTAS
Formed in 1945, last season they won a Europa League tie at the sixth time of asking, beating Luxembourg's Dudelange, only to lose in the next round. Their Russian coach, Konstantin Sarsania, is popular for fielding young players and signed 10 LFF academy graduates.

KLAIPEDOS GRANITAS
Formed in 2012, the club play on an artificial surface and are coached by Gediminas Jarmalavicius.

KRUOJA
Formed in 1991 and promoted to the A Lyga in 2009, they finished runners-up in 2014 and qualified for the Europa League for a second successive season. Assistant coach Aidas Dambrauskas is in charge while a match-fixing investigation into Divaldo Alves is completed.

SIAULIAI
Winners of the league in 2004, but since then they have not finished higher than fourth. Coached by Tomas Razanauskas.

SPYRIS
Formed in 2004, they are coached by Laimis Bickauskas and share the Darius & Girenas Stadium with Stumbras. They were recently taken over by Kaunas-based basketball club Zalgiris, which is also the name of the A Lyga team in Vilnius. Confusingly, Spyris now play with Zalgiris on their shirts.

STUMBRAS
Formed in 2012, they are owned and named after AB Stumbras – the country's biggest alcoholic drinks group. Coached by Darius Gvildys, who likes to play youngsters and has 10 graduates from the LFF national academy in his squad.

SUDUVA
Based in the industrial city of Marijampole and coached by Alexander Veselinovic, they were formed in 1921 and are one of Lithuania's oldest club sides.

TRAKAI
Based in a popular tourist resort which only has a population of 7,000 – so first-team games are played at the LFF Stadium in Vilnius. Coached by Valdas Urbonas, they were formed in 2005 but did not turn professional until 2011, winning promotion to the A Lyga in 2014.

UTENIS
Formed in 1933, the north east-based side are one of the best-supported A Lyga clubs, with crowds of around 2,000. Before joining Utenis, coach Mindaugas Cepas was instrumental in saving Zalgiris when they went bust and since then the two clubs have developed close links.

ZALGIRIS
The current A Lyga champions are coached by Valdas Dambrauskas. The original FK Zalgiris were formed in 1946 and finished third in the old Soviet League in 1987. They went bust in 2009, but were subsequently revived and won a court case to reclaim the identity of the old club.

Banned...Lithuania under-21 Rytis Pilotas (right)

are tempted because they often wait three months to get paid. With 12 per cent of A Lyga players also lacking a contract, there is no legal recourse.

"Our football is not professional," sighs Raimondas Statkevicius, the director of the LFF's football academy.

Like many involved in Lithuanian football, he is reluctant to discuss match-fixing and says "I don't like these questions", as his bald head momentarily dips towards the table before he looks up with a steely glint in his eye.

Statkevicius is involved with the latest investigation but prefers to discuss the LFF academy in Kaunas, which has produced 50 players including the side that took part in the 2013 Euro Under-19 Championship. Lithuania were the host nation and – although all three games were lost – Spain, Portugal and Holland were run close.

A total of 58,000 people watched the finals, which shows Lithuanians are still keen to watch their national team. But recreating the same enthusiasm in the club game remains a major battle. WS

NO LONGER WITH US

Since independence in 1991, 20 clubs have disappeared

CLUB	LOCATION	FOUNDED	FOLDED
Neris[1]	Vilnius	1989	1991
Vilija	Kaunas	1971	1991
Zydrius	Marijampole	1994	1994
Romar	Mazeikiai	1992	1995
Sakalas[2]	Siauliai	1935	1995
Politechnika	Kaunas	1992	1998
Sirijus	Klaipeda	1973	1998
Panerys	Vilnius	1975	1999
Lokomotyvas	Vilnius	1951	2000
Inkaras	Kaunas	1937	2003
Vienybe	Ukmerge	1962	2005
FC Vilnius	Vilnius	2003	2008
Kauno Jegeriai	Kaunas	1993	2009
Vetra	Vilnius	1997	2010
Atletas	Kaunas	2005	2011
FC Klaipeda	Klaipeda	2005	2011
Interas	Visaginas	1979	2011
REO	Vilnius	2005	2012
Dainava	Alytus	1935	2014
Ekranas	Panevezys	1964	2014

[1] Briefly revived as Lietuvos Makabi but collapsed again in 1993
[2] Renamed Kareda in 1995 and moved to Kaunas in 2003 before eventually folding in 2003.

Five key figures in Lithuanian football

JULIUS KVEDARAS
The LFF's low-key president took over in 2012 after 12 years as general secretary. He has strengthened the rules on overseas signings, which now restrict clubs to six non-Lithuanian players.

RAIMONDAS STATKEVICIUS
Director of the LFF academy, which started in 2008. The first intake graduated in 2013, when Lithuania staged the Euro Under-19 finals, and some have since signed with clubs such as Leicester City and Stuttgart.

IGORIS PANKRATJEVAS
Won only a handful of caps as a player but was voted coach of the year after guiding Zalgiris back to the A Lyga in 2010 and finishing third. Appointed permanent national coach in December 2013.

DEIVIDAS SEMBERAS
The defensive midfielder spent 15 years playing in Russia for Dynamo Moscow, CSKA Moscow and Alania Vladikavkaz before joining boyhood club Zalgiris last year. The 37-year-old has 82 international caps.

IVAN NEVOINA
The man behind LitInvest – which has interests in oil and petrol stations – and the owner of Trakai. He has moved their home games to Vilnius and in 2013 he bought a football-camp franchise from Italian giants Milan.

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City revert to one up top

Manuel Pellegrini seems to have given up on the idea of playing with two front men this season, says Jonathan Wilson

Football journalism tends to be a pretty cynical world and it's not often you hear an intake of breath from an entire press room. But a little over an hour before Manchester City kicked off against Barcelona in the last 16 of the Champions League last year, the hubbub inside the Etihad was replaced by a brief and disbelieving silence.

We looked at the team and we looked again. But it was true; City were taking on Barca, whose midfield had probably been the best in Europe for six or seven years, with a 4-4-2.

It was a plan so contrary to the received wisdom that, after the initial shock, there was a brief thought that such radicalism might be genius. The Spanish side had looked suspect at the back in recent weeks and their centre-backs rarely had to deal with a strike pairing, while David Silva and Samir Nasri were typical wide men as they liked to drift into more central roles to bolster the holding midfielders.

It didn't, however, take long for the reality to become apparent.

The visitors took control of midfield and, with Lionel Messi dazzling, City were lucky to be only 2-0 down at half-time. Fernandinho's introduction for Nasri just after the hour made City more competitive in midfield and they pulled one back, only for the dismissal of Gael Clichy to end their resurgence. It's safe to assume that Manuel Pellegrini will not make the same mistake again.

> City were taking on Barcelona, whose midfield had probably been the best in Europe for six or seven years, with a 4-4-2

One of the more mysterious features of the Champions League over the past four seasons has been the repeated failure of City: two group-stage exits and then defeat in the last 16 in the past two seasons. The suggestion that it is all down to a lack of experience in the competition only washes as far as City's coefficient – which, because of the way they were suddenly propelled to super-club status by Sheikh Mansoor's investment, is lower than that of equivalent clubs and has therefore made a harder draw more likely.

Intent...Yaya Toure in action during the 3-0 win against Chelsea

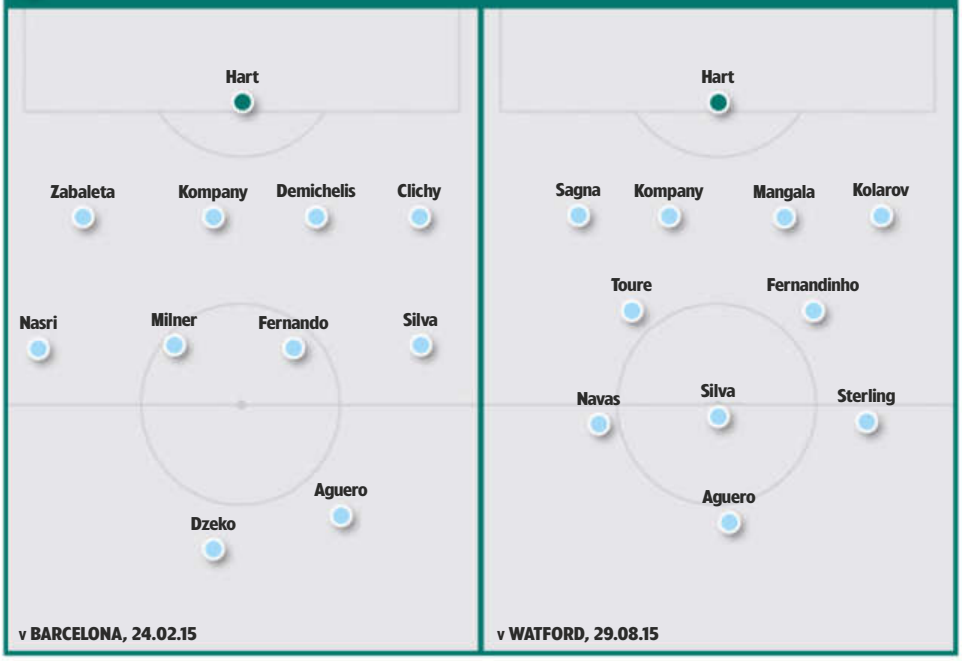
Under Pellegrini, there has at least been a tactical explanation. He has taken charge of 16 Champions League games with City, and in nine of them he has played with two strikers. It's a trait that was becoming increasingly puzzling.

Now that's not to say that there's inherently anything wrong with 4-4-2. As England manager Roy Hodgson has pointed out, most formations revert to two banks of four when out of possession.

The problem has been that the players City have had at the back of the midfield haven't offered sufficient protection to the back four. This at least in part explains why Vincent Kompany looked so out of sorts last season, as he was repeatedly lured forward to try to win the ball in the space that should have been occupied by one of the defensive midfielders.

Apportioning blame when the failure was systemic isn't easy and probably isn't

CITY HAVE CHANGED FROM A 4-4-2 LAST TERM TO 4-2-3-1 THIS SEASON



Addition...Raheem Sterling's signing means City now have pace on both flanks

fair, but the questions about Yaya Toure last season were reasonable. Was his application lacking or was it just that, at 32, he no longer has the stamina to get up and down the pitch as he used to?

Either way, his indifferent form was part of a wider problem.

The early stages of this season suggest City may have resolved that and, despite again being drawn in a tough group, they may at last be able to impose themselves in the Champions League.

Significantly, the shape has changed, and so has the make-up of the squad. With Alvaro Negredo, Stevan Jovetic and Edin Dzeko gone, there's little temptation to play with two centre-forwards – though Wilfried Bony and Sergio Aguero could play together if required.

There seems to be an acceptance that City will play 4-2-3-1 from now on, and that seems to have come with a greater defensive solidity – they didn't concede at all in their first four league games, which included a 3-0 victory over reigning champions Chelsea.

More significant, though, is what the addition of Raheem Sterling has meant to the forward line. Whereas Silva or Nasri would usually play on the left last season, drifting infield, the versatility of Sterling means that there can now be pace on

Pair...Sergio Aguero (centre) and Edin Dzeko played up front against Barcelona

both flanks. In those first four league games, Sterling has played in the left with Jesus Navas on the right, although Sterling did shift into the centre at half-time against Watford, with Silva moving to the left and Nasri coming in on the right.

The arrival of Kevin De Bruyne from Wolfsburg increases those options even further and presumably means less pitch time for Navas.

There is a knock-on effect as well. With pace on both flanks, teams will instinctively sit deep against City, but if they do, they risk leaving space that Silva can float in. Push up to restrict him, though, and the danger is that the opposition leave space behind for the pace of Sterling, Aguero and Navas to exploit.

After the weary trudge of much of last season, Pellegrini's Manchester City are looking sharp again and, more importantly, they may have the balance and the compactness in midfield to make their mark in Europe. WS

Timeline

NOV 13, 2002
Makes his Bayern Munich debut – as a substitute in the Champions League at home to Lens – and creates a goal in a 3-3 draw.

SEP 13, 2003
Scores his first goal for Bayern, away to Wolfsburg in a 3-2 loss in the Bundesliga.

JUN 6, 2004
Appears as a half-time sub in a friendly against Hungary for his international debut.

MAY 28, 2005
Bayern beat Schalke 2-1 to win the German Cup and complete a second double in three seasons.

JUN 8, 2005
Scores his first international goals with a brace as Germany draw 2-2 with Russia in a friendly in Monchengladbach.

Natural-born winner

He was the heart and soul of Bayern Munich, but the iconic German midfielder has now taken his talent to England

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

No one should have been startled at the incandescent reaction of many Bayern Munich supporters to the summer sale of emblematic midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger to Manchester United. A placard hung by fans outside the club's headquarters in Sabener Strasse accused chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and coach Pep Guardiola of "destroying our identity".

Supporters always cherish a local boy made good and Schweinsteiger, the blonde kid from the Bavarian village of Oberaudorf at the foot of the Alps, was exactly that. A loyal, unflinching Bayern servant for 17 years, he was an insatiable collector of honours and an influential skipper.

As a result of the 30-year-old's move to Old Trafford, Bayern have lost much more than an extraordinary midfield ▸

MAR 8, 2006
Bayern are knocked out of the Champions League with a 4-1 defeat in Milan, losing 5-2 on aggregate in the round of 16.

JUL 8, 2006
Scores twice in Stuttgart as host nation Germany beat Portugal 3-1 to finish third in the World Cup.

SEP 6, 2006
Scores twice as Germany record their biggest-ever victory with a 13-0 win away to San Marino in the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

MAY 1, 2008
Bayern are beaten 4-0 away to Zenit in the semi-final second leg of the UEFA Cup and lose 5-1 on aggregate.

MAY 17, 2008
A third double in four years is celebrated on the final day of the season following a 4-1 win at home to Hertha Berlin.

JUN 12, 2008
Sent off after coming on as a sub in a Euro 2008 defeat by Croatia. Germany go on to lose to Spain in the Final.

MAY 15, 2010
Scores the fourth goal in a 4-0 win against Werder Bremen in the German Cup Final.

general. The club's first Bavarian on-field leader since the chain-smoking, forward-devouring libero Klaus Augenthaler retired in 1991, Schweinsteiger embodied the self-confidence and ravenous hunger of today's Bayern. And such was his huge popularity that he could literally do no wrong at the Allianz Arena, even being forgiven for a decisive penalty miss in the shoot-out loss on home soil to Chelsea in the 2012 Champions League Final.

After so many years living the Bayern dream – arriving there at the age of 13, making his debut in a Champions League tie against Lens of France four years later, and subsequently becoming the beating heart of the first XI – the widely held assumption was that he would never leave, eventually joining the likes of Augenthaler, goalkeeper Sepp Maier, midfielder Klaus Durnberger and stopper Georg Schwarzenbeck in the Bayern one-club-man Hall of Fame.

But depart he has – and with him has gone a substantial chunk of Bayern's history and DNA.

"Bastian was the heart and soul of the team," former Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes told *Kicker* magazine. "He gave his all for the team and not himself. We'll never see his like again at FC Bayern.

"Above all, he's an icon and figurehead for Bayern fans. He has to go in the same category as Franz Beckenbauer and Gerd Muller. The Bundesliga and German football are going to miss him."

Convinced that "Schweini" would have stayed at Bayern if a decent new contract had been forthcoming, fans were quick to blame Guardiola and Rummenigge. The former for deliberately marginalising their hero and preferring Xabi Alonso as the engine-room regulator while disrespectfully shoe-horning the local hero into a number of unfamiliar midfield roles; the latter for giving his coach too much control.

It's a theory full of malice aforethought, but far from the whole story. In truth, Schweinsteiger and Guardiola's working relationship was a normal one, and if the Bayern movers and shakers were unsure about offering him a contract extension beyond 2016, that was solely because of his poor injury record over the past two seasons.

Since playing a key role in Bayern's trophy-laden campaign of 2012-13 – during which he made 45 appearances – persistent knee and ankle problems have led to him playing more and more infrequently – 36 games in 2013-14 and 28 last term.

Taking into account the miles on the clock – not to mention his €12-€14million a year salary and many other fine central midfielders on Bayern's books – Guardiola, Rummenigge and director of sport Matthias Sammer had a tough call to make. Was it to be sentiment at any cost, or diplomatically turn the page and listen to offers?

Schweinsteiger was certainly not run out of town. With Euro 2016 just around the corner, Germany's national captain simply could not afford a season on the bench at Bayern. So when Manchester United came calling, it was the perfect escape route at the perfect moment.

A huge admirer of the English game, he had long toyed with the idea of setting up home in the Premier League – and as an added bonus he would be linking up again with his old Bayern coach, Louis Van Gaal, the Dutchman widely credited with transforming his sporting life.

Van Gaal has a long track record of successfully switching players to new and more productive positions. But never was he more inspired in the re-defining game than the day in autumn 2009 when he converted Schweinsteiger from a creative, hard-shooting wide midfielder to deep-lying playmaker.

Peerless in his ability to read the game, and with a flair for linking the play and varying the rhythm, he quickly developed into a world-class operational nerve centre. And by the end of that season he would have the prizes to prove it: a domestic league and cup double, plus a Champions League runners-up medal and bronze at the

Heartbreak...Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech saves Schweinsteiger's penalty as Bayern lose the 2012 Champions League Final shoot-out

> "Bastian was the heart and soul of the team...We'll never see his like again at FC Bayern"
>
> **Former Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes**

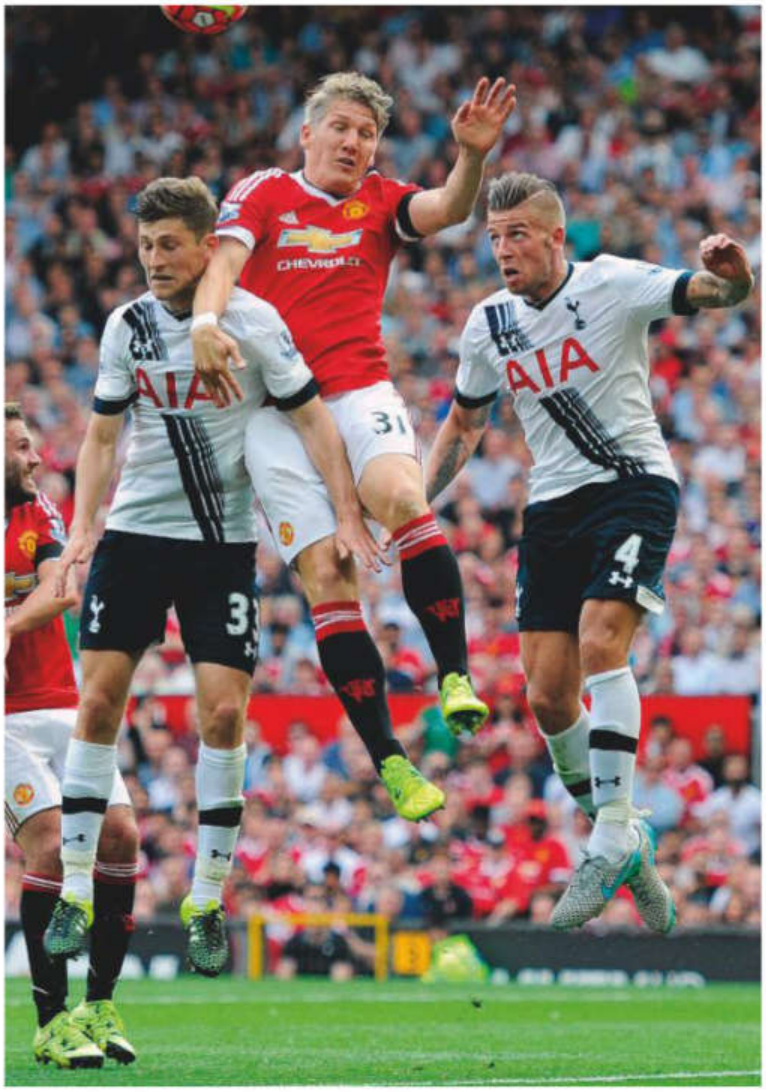
On target... celebrating a goal against Cologne in the Bundesliga

MAY 22, 2010 – Bayern, in their first Champions League Final for nine years, lose 2-0 to Internazionale in Madrid.

JUL 7, 2010 – Suffers World Cup dejection as Germany lose 1-0 in the semi-finals to Spain in Durban, South Africa.

NOV 2, 2011 – Breaks his collarbone in the Champions League group game against Napoli and is out for two months.

APR 25, 2012 – Scores the winning spot-kick in a penalty shoot-out win against Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals.



Flying start...making a winning debut in the Premier League as United beat Tottenham Hotspur

2010 World Cup finals in South Africa, the tournament in which he took over from the injured Michael Ballack as the brains of the *Nationalmannschaft*.

After the frustration of four big tournament near-misses, Germany and Schweinsteiger finally went all the way at Brazil 2014 and, according to coach Joachim Low, the influence of the midfield commander was absolutely fundamental.

"He is this team's emotional leader," Low said. "He has outstanding leadership qualities. We need him on the pitch as much as off it."

Thanks to Van Gaal, a new and improved Schweinsteiger had emerged. Following many years in soft focus as teen idol, World Cup 2006 poster boy and all-round fun-lover, at the age of 25 he hit maturity. He suddenly became more interested in work ethic and the team's well-being than hanging out at Bash Street, an in-vogue Munich hairstylists on Sendlinger Strasse

"For me, he's no longer 'Schweini', just Bastian," declared Bayern president Uli Hoeness at the time. "He's had a super season. He's become a man.

"He's made a big leap from the crazy youngster who had no direction in life to a very responsible player who works for us on a strategic level and puts in a shift physically.

"I've often given him a kick up the backside, but he always reacted well. He didn't say: 'Not that idiot again.' He knew that I wanted what was best for him."

For the young Schweinsteiger, excess was normal, his misdemeanours including early-morning disco sightings, motoring offences and an infamous incident in 2009 when he was caught late at night with a young lady in the club's training-ground whirlpool bath. He later claimed he was just showing a cousin around his place of work, but whatever his motives, Bayern's then-coach, Ottmar Hitzfeld, was not at all impressed, commenting: "I hope he now understands that as a young professional, he is a role model."

Bayern's long-serving youth and reserve team boss at the time was Hermann Gerland, and although he was renowned as a hard taskmaster, even Gerland had trouble keeping a handle on the young star-in-the-making's wayward lifestyle.

"Like all youngsters of that age, he often did silly things," Gerland told *11 Freunde* magazine. "There was the driving without a licence, the painted fingernails, the always-changing hairstyles.

Fans' favourite... Schweinsteiger could do no wrong with the Bayern faithful

"At the age of 17, he once came down to breakfast with dyed black hair because he'd lost a bet. I told him he'd have to go out running until he was blonde again."

His tendency to ignore the straight and narrow made certain decision-makers at Bayern wonder if he was worth all the trouble. Fortunately for Schweinsteiger, he had Gerland in his corner.

"When he was criticised, I would ask the person making the comments if he used to run around with a prayer book," Gerland told *Suddeutsche Zeitung*. "At the time he had some stupid ideas but was a nice kid all the same. There was nothing malicious about him. He was always charming.

"The difference between him and

Misses a crucial penalty at 3-3 in the shoot-out as Bayern lose to Chelsea in the Champions League Final.

MAY 19, 2012

Scores against Eintracht Frankfurt with a cheeky back-heel to secure the Bundesliga title for Bayern.

APR 6, 2013

A 2-1 win against Borussia Dortmund at Wembley secures Bayern's fifth Champions Cup – and their first since 2001.

MAY 25, 2013

Wins his 100th cap for Germany in a 5-3 friendly defeat of Sweden.

OCT 15, 2013

Philipp Lahm was that Philipp looked like a 15-year-old and played as though he was 30. Lahm at 15 was a grown-up; Basti always liked to joke around."

Schweinsteiger's progression from carefree, almost reckless adolescent to meticulous professional and fight-until-you-drop competitor has, indeed, been a remarkable one. But according to Gerland, the drive and desire were always at the heart of his make-up.

"Although not a leader at that stage, he was a fighter and always wanted to win," says the 61-year-old. "He just wanted to play football. Even when no training was scheduled on a Wednesday, he'd still be out on the pitch working on his game. Out in the cold wearing his woolly hat.

"Nor was he one of those youngsters who'd beg you for a match in a session without a ball. He wasn't one to whine or complain.

"The biggest compliment I can pay him is he made his first-team breakthrough under Ottmar Hitzfeld. Hitzfeld only wanted world-class players, or at least guys with plenty of experience. He wasn't interested in the youth system. For 'Basti' to get into his team at 18 says it all."

The indomitable spirit Schweinsteiger displayed in the face of an Argentinian pounding in last year's World Cup Final – battered, bleeding but defiant to the end – was not the first time he had shown guts in the sports arena. Slalom and giant slalom skiing, two other disciplines he excelled in as a schoolboy, are not for the faint-hearted. So talented was he on the slopes that he could conceivably have turned pro like his childhood friend and world champion Felix Neureuther.

Sport, in all its forms, was a permanent backdrop in Schweinsteiger's formative years. His father, Alfred, ran a sports shop in Oberaudorf, his family were all keen skiers, and elder brother Tobias, who is two years his senior, skied and played football and was good enough to play up front professionally for Lubeck, Unterhaching and the Bayern second-string before taking up a recent coaching appointment in the latter's academy.

Kitted out in Germany's strip from their triumphant Italia 90 campaign, Schweinsteiger was just three years old when his dad enrolled him at local club FV Oberaudorf, a paradise for the toddler who just loved to dribble and score goals.

"Even at that early age, it was obvious that Basti had a special talent," recalls Oberaudorf chairman Alois Holzmaier. "He passed the ball like no other child at the club, was very direct when going for goal and played with enormous determination.

"You also used to regularly see his dad taking him and his brother for extra training. With us, he invariably used to compete against youngsters who were two years older. He was so good, we didn't often lose. In fact, one season, his side had a 113-3 goal difference."

After four years working on the basics at FVO, his next stop was 1860 Rosenheim, where, over the next-half dozen years, he would lay down the foundations for his golden ticket to the Bayern academy.

"He had this great will-to-win," recalls Rosenheim schoolboy coach Franz Garhammer. "He was born to achieve results. He's had that since the cradle.

"Basti's team back then really was a gifted bunch. Seven of them later became professionals. Indeed, the team's best player was not Schweinsteiger. That was Florian Heller [a now-retired forward who used to feature for Mainz and Ingolstadt].

"Basti, though, was a real potent force and remains so today. Not many possess this gene."

Van Gaal, Low and Schweinsteiger's many admirers in the Bayern community would doubtless agree. WS

Big splash...fun time after 2008 German Cup Final win over Borussia Dortmund

> "He is this team's emotional leader. He has outstanding leadership qualities. We need him on the pitch as much as off it"
>
> Germany coach Joachim Low

Pals...with boyhood friend and skiing world champion Felix Neureuther (right)

Bloodied...in the thick of it during the 2014 World Cup Final against Argentina

Scores but is then sent off in the Champions League quarter-final first leg against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

APR 1, 2014

Plays all 120 minutes of the 1-0 win against Argentina in the World Cup Final.

JUL 13, 2014

Scores in his 500th and last game for Bayern as they beat Mainz 2-0 to secure his eighth title with the club.

MAY 23, 2015

Joins Manchester United for a fee of around £14m and links up again with his old club coach Louis Van Gaal.

JUL 13, 2015

Makes his Premier League debut in a 1-0 win at home to Tottenham Hotspur.

AUG 8, 2015

Bastian Schweinsteiger

the numbers game

FIRST GERMAN RED DEVIL

SCHWEINSTEIGER is the first German to play for Manchester United. Markus Neumayr and Ron-Robert Zieler were at the club before him, but neither made it into the first team.

Most Bundesliga titles

OLIVER KAHN, **MEHMET SCHOLL** and **BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER** *(all with Bayern Munich)*

German player of the year

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
ARJEN ROBBEN (Bayern Munich)	MANUEL NEUER (Schalke)	MARCO REUS (Borussia M'gladbach)	BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER (Bayern Munich)	MANUEL NEUER (Bayern Munich)	KEVIN DE BRUYNE (Wolfsburg)

GERMANY

111 CAPS

23 GOALS

European games for Bayern

GERMANY MEDALS

HONOURS

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
BUNDESLIGA	🏆	-	🏆	🏆	-	🏆	-	🏆	-	-	🏆	🏆	🏆
GERMAN CUP	🏆	-	🏆	🏆	-	🏆	-	🏆	-	-	🏆	🏆	-
GERMAN LEAGUE CUP	-	🏆	-	-	🏆	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GERMAN SUPER CUP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	🏆	-	🏆	-	-	-
CHAMPIONS LEAGUE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	🏆	-	-
UEFA SUPER CUP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	🏆	-	-
CLUB WORLD CUP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	🏆	-	-
WORLD CUP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	🏆	-

*(*up to & including 22.08.15)*

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6 of the best

Champions League stars

Nick Bidwell picks the players to look out for in the group stage

1 Douglas COSTA

BAYERN MUNICH

Unsure of the ability of star wide men Franck Ribery and Arjen Robben to stay healthy for an entire season, Bayern seem to have found the answer to their predicament in the small but deadly shape of their new €30million signing from Shakhtar Donetsk.

The 24-year-old Brazilian, who is able to go one-on-one at pace on either flank, has taken no time at all to settle in at the Allianz Arena – and unlike the other wing wizards at the club, he has both youth and physical toughness on his side.

With Ribery and Robben out for long spells last season, Bayern overly focused on attacking through the middle – so Costa's primary task will be to make sure that variety remains the spice of the side's attacking life this time round.

An experienced Champions League campaigner, he made 34 appearances in the competition over the course of five seasons at Shakhtar.

2 Jackson MARTINEZ

ATLETICO MADRID

No excuses will be tolerated, so if Atletico's expensive new Colombian striker wants to be a success at the Vicente Calderon, he must regularly display both sides of his sporting persona: his goals galore finishing of the past three seasons at Porto – 92 in 132 games – and his ability to harry, press and disrupt with the sort of intense work ethic which drove Bayern Munich defenders to distraction in a Champions League quarter-final last spring.

Under pressure to live up to his €35m price tag, he also has to face inevitable comparisons with compatriot Radamel Falcao who, on quitting Porto for Atletico in 2011, went on a two-year scoring bonanza and notched 70 goals in 91 games.

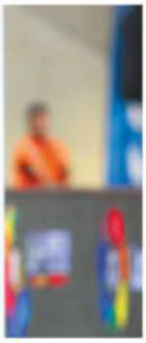
3 Iker CASILLAS

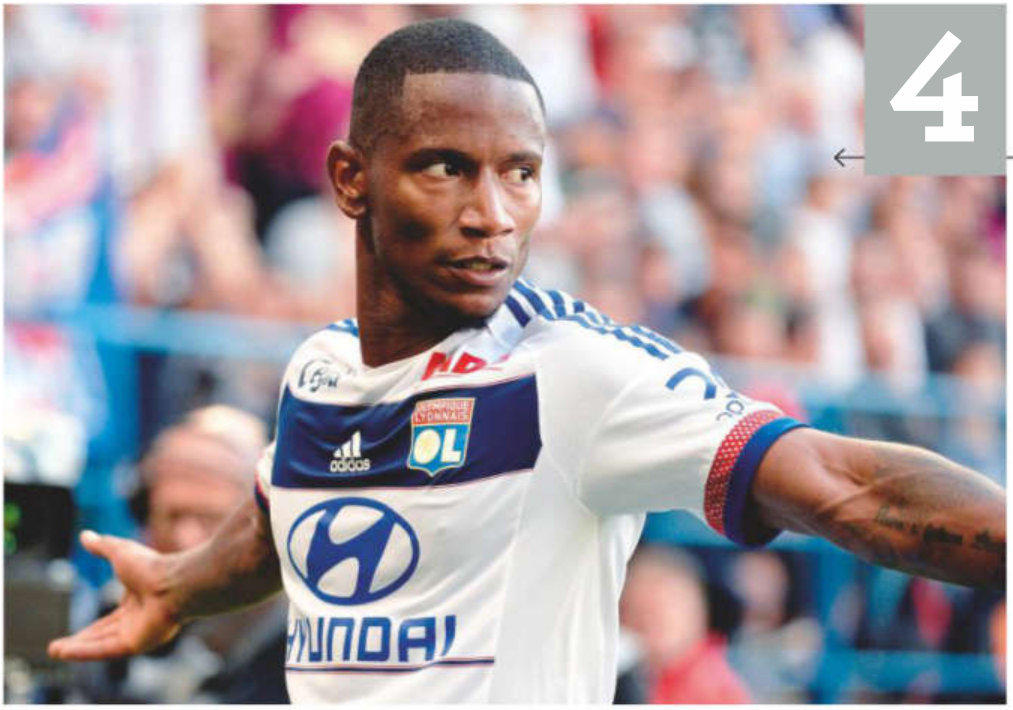
PORTO

This season will be groundbreaking for the Spaniard, who recently called time on two-and-a-half decades of devotion to Real Madrid. This campaign he is all set to overtake ex-Barcelona idol Xavi's record of 151 Champions League appearances.

During the past 40 years, Porto have boasted several fine keepers – notably Ze Beto, Jozef Mlynarczyk and Vitor Baia – but never have they possessed such a superstar between the posts, and his aura and extensive know-how should prove invaluable.

He did not see eye to eye with Jose Mourinho when the pair were at Real and the pairing of Porto and Chelsea in Group G could see an acrimonious reunion.





4 Claudio BEAUVUE

LYON

His profile boosted by 27 goals in all competitions last term – including 17 in Ligue 1 and five in the Europa League – the prolific Guingamp striker required little persuasion to sign for OL, where he will taste the Champions League for the first time and link up with his good friend Alexandre Lacazette.

With strength in the air, ability to set up others and intelligent movement, the 27-year-old from Guadeloupe is the classic late developer. He has spent the bulk of his career in the second tier with Troyes and Chateauroux, and only a couple of seasons in the top flight.

He has not looked back since being switched from the right wing to centre-forward at Guingamp.

5 PEDRO

CHELSEA

While some felt Chelsea's €30m purchase of the Barcelona forward was a panic buy following their half-baked start to the new season, the club have not exactly closed their eyes and thrown a dart at the board.

In seven years in the Barca first-team squad, the Canary Islander has played a key role in landing 22 top trophies, including three Champions Leagues. With his flair for goals (99 in 321 appearances for the *blaugrana*), technical quality and ability to menacingly drift inside from the right or left, he could be a wonderful extra dimension for Jose Mourinho's side.

Courted by Manchester United, his arrival at Stamford Bridge was the slickest of kidnappings.

6 Mateo KOVACIC

REAL MADRID

Real Madrid's decision to spend €32m on Internazionale's young Croat midfielder was undoubtedly one of the most unexpected deals of the window.

Despite his boy-wonder status in his native land and his many gifts – not least his outrageous skill, elegance and driving runs from deep – his 30-month spell at Inter, who he joined in January 2011 from Dinamo Zagreb, was anything but convincing, and the Galacticos clearly have taken a calculated gamble.

The word is Real see him as a long-term "project" and, if they are more patient with him than Inter, they could well be rewarded.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

French champions are desperate to succeed in Europe

STAR MAN

Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC

The enigmatic Swede has won titles in Holland, Italy, Spain and France. Rumours persist that he is keen to return to Italy.

COACH

Laurent BLANC

Succeeded Carlo Ancelotti in July 2013 and faced criticism last season despite winning Ligue 1. His contract runs to 2016.

PSG have few challenges left in domestic French football and have been Ligue 1 champions for the past three seasons, thanks to millions from Qatar. However, the Qatari "project" will not be complete until they have succeeded in the Champions League.

■ Last season, PSG were punished by UEFA for breaking Financial Fairplay rules, but their fine and Champions League squad restrictions had little impact. They showed strength of character to overcome Chelsea in the first knockout round, when Zlatan Ibrahimovic was harshly sent off, but without their star man in the quarter-final, Barcelona were too good.

■ With the partial relaxing of FFP, PSG splashed out €63m to sign long-term target Angel Di Maria (Manchester United) and also brought in left-back Layvin Kurzawa (Monaco), keeper Kevin Trapp (Stuttgart) and midfielder Benjamin Stambouli (Tottenham Hotspur). Left-back Lucas Digne left for Roma on loan.

■ French international midfielder Yohan Cabaye returned to England, to Crystal Palace, after a frustrating 18 months. His lack of playing time gives an indication of the strength of midfield options open to coach Laurent Blanc.

Key players: captain and centre-back Thiago Silva; record signing Di Maria; dynamic midfielder Blaise Matuidi.

Stadium: Parc des Princes (48,000). Will host five games at Euro 2016.

■ TACTICS

To accommodate Di Maria, Edinson Cavani, Javier Pastore and Lucas Moura will compete for a single attacking berth, though Pastore can play deeper. Adrien Rabiot and Stambouli are other options in central midfield.

Defensive linchpin...Thiago Silva (in white)

REAL MADRID

Benitez called in to overturn Barcelona dominance

STAR MAN

Cristiano RONALDO

The Portuguese star scored 61 goals for Real last season, including 48 in La Liga and nine in the Champions League.

COACH

Rafa BENITEZ

Agreed a three-year deal with his home-town club this summer after his contract at Napoli expired at the end of last season.

Despite guiding Real to the club's 10th European Cup in 2014, Carlo Ancelotti was sacked at the end of last season and the club turned to ex-Valencia and Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez.

■ Madrid won the Club World Cup, but the rest of last season was spent in the shadow of Barcelona's treble. Their bid to retain the Champions League ended in the semi-finals against Juventus, with former Real striker Alvaro Morata scoring the winning goal.

■ With Barca still under a transfer embargo, there was less urgency about Real's transfer market activity this summer. They ultimately missed out on their prime target, Manchester United goalkeeper David De Gea, while Sergio Ramos used speculation over a swap deal to secure a new contract.

■ Croatia midfielder Mateo Kovacic joined from Internazionale in a surprise move, while Brazilian full-back Danilo moved from Porto. Midfielder Asier Illarramendi returned to Real Sociedad after two years.

Key players: Wales forward Gareth Bale; Croatia midfielder Luka Modric; defender Ramos.

Stadium: Estadio Santiago Bernabeu (81,000). The club has ambitious plans to expand the capacity to 90,000 and add a retractable roof.

■ TACTICS

There has been speculation over Bale, with Benitez keen to give him a central, free role behind the main striker. Bale is most effective when running on to balls and into space, but can he play as a no10, where space is more limited and form a relationship with Ronaldo? The arrival of Kovacic raises questions over the role of Isco, with Kovacic likely to start if Real opt for a midfield three.

New deal...Sergio Ramos (right)

SHAKHTAR DONETSK

War on home front sees games moved to Lviv

STAR MAN

Alex TEIXEIRA

Summer departures have left the former Brazil under-20 international as a crucial figure in his side's attacking plans.

COACH

Mircea LUCESCU

The Romanian, who is 70 this summer, is one of the longest-serving coaches in Europe, holding the Shakhtar reins since 2004.

The Ukrainian side are competing in the group stage for a sixth successive year, despite encountering huge problems at home.

■ Shakhtar beat Rapid Vienna in the play-offs after an earlier victory over Fenerbahce, but attracted controversy for playing midfielder Fred, even though the Brazilian international was thought to have failed a dope test at the Copa America.

■ Shakhtar have been forced to play home games in Lviv after the civil war in eastern Ukraine forced them to abandon their state-of-the-art stadium and training centre in Donetsk.

■ The club is owned by Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest man, but he was unable to prevent the departures of a string of Brazilian players this summer. Midfielder Douglas Costa was sold to Bayern Munich, striker Luiz Adriano joined Milan and Sampdoria signed midfielder Fernando. Another midfielder, Ilsinho, returned to Brazil after his contract expired.

■ Despite the departures, the Brazilian influence remains strong, with the return of Brazilian-born Croatia striker Eduardo from a spell at Flamengo.

Key players: captain Darijo Srna; Brazilian midfielder Taison; striker Oleksandr Hladkyy.

Stadium: Arena Lviv (34,000). Was a host venue for Euro 2012.

■ TACTICS

The loss of Adriano and several other key players has forced Lucescu to adapt from an attack-minded 4-4-2 to once more focus on counter-attacking. Brazilians still populate midfield, while Teixeira pulls the strings and Eduardo vies with Hladkyy for the role of lone striker.

Attacking intent...midfielder Marlos (left)

MALMO

Swedes to adopt a more direct approach in Europe

STAR MAN

Markus ROSENBERG

The veteran striker and captain, now 32, is back at his first club after spells in Holland, Germany, Spain and England.

COACH

Age HAREIDE

The 61-year-old former Norway national coach came out of retirement to take charge of Malmo in 2014.

The Swedish champions are competing in the group stage for a second successive season.

■ Malmo reached this year's group stage after beating Celtic in a bad-tempered play-off game in which keeper Johan Wiland accused the Scottish club's players of acting like "pigs". In the earlier qualifying rounds Malmo beat Zalgiris of Lithuania and Austria's Red Bull Salzburg.

■ Age Hareide's side have won the Swedish league for the past two seasons and were European Cup finalists in 1979.

■ Last season Malmo finished bottom of their Champions League group following home-and-away defeats by Juventus and Atletico Madrid.

■ This summer, they took Serbian striker Nikola Djurdjic on loan from Augsburg but lost Erik Johansson to Belgian champions Gent. Wiland joined from Copenhagen as a replacement for Robin Olsen, who moved to PAOK in Greece.

Key players: midfielder Oscar Lewicki; winger Jo Inge Berget; striker Djurdjic.

Stadium: Swedbank Stadion (21,000). Known as Malmo New Stadium for UEFA competitions and was opened in 2009.

■ TACTICS

Within a team framework based on typically Nordic athleticism and discipline, Hareide lightens the mix with a heavy sprinkling of tactical flexibility, regularly switching to 5-3-2 and 4-3-3. In the Champions League, Malmo tend to play with far less adventure than in the Allsvenskan, happy to concentrate on counter-attacks, well-rehearsed set-piece moves and a more direct approach.

On loan...Nikola Djurdjic

PSV

New blood to replace last season's stars

STAR MAN

Luuk DE JONG

The 25-year-old striker has thrived since returning to Holland following an ill-timed move to Germany.

COACH

Philip COCU

Former Barcelona star who was assistant to Bert Van Marwijk at the 2010 World Cup before returning to PSV as a coach.

The Dutch champions are back in the Champions League group stage for the first since 2008-09.

■ Last season PSV broke Ajax's stranglehold on the Dutch league title, but over the summer they lost key figures in Memphis Depay and Georginio Wijnaldum to Premier League clubs.

■ The hefty fees for the pair were re-invested in a number of new signings: midfielder Davy Propper from Vitesse, Belgian winger Maxime Lestienne on loan from Al Arabi, Uruguayan midfielder Gaston Pereiro from Nacional, Danish full-back Simon Poulsen from AZ and Mexican defender Hector Moreno from Espanyol.

■ Philip Cocu had a difficult start in his first season as coach but became only the third man – after Eric Gerets and Ronald Koeman – to win the Eredivisie with PSV as both a player and a coach.

■ Last season PSV reached the last 32 of the Europa League before being heavily beaten by Zenit.

Key players: Mexican midfielder Andres Guardado; midfielder Propper; winger Luciano Narsingh.

Stadium: Philips Stadion (35,000). Originally built as part of a sports complex for employees of the Philips electronic company.

■ TACTICS

In PSV's 4-1-4-1 formation, Guardado provides the platform for the attacking midfielders to flourish. Lestienne has taken on the left-wing role in which Depay thrived last season, while Propper has taken on Wijnaldum's central creative role. Exciting left-back Jetro Willems will be a valuable asset when he returns from injury.

Midfield glue...Andres Guardado

MANCHESTER UNITED

Back after missing out last year

STAR MAN

Wayne ROONEY

The United and England captain faces a crucial season ahead of Euro 2016. Talent remains, but injuries have taken their toll.

COACH

Louis VAN GAAL

Won the competition with Ajax in 1995 and took Bayern Munich to the 2010 Final. Says he will retire when his contract is up in 2017.

United are back in European competition after their first season away since the early 1990s. Last year's Premier League campaign, the second since Alex Ferguson's retirement, saw them reclaim their place in the top four.

■ United take their place in the group stage after thrashing Club Brugge of Belgium 7-1 on aggregate in the play-off round.

■ Louis Van Gaal's tactical blueprint remains unclear. The thick-skinned Dutchman brought in plenty of new players last season, but the most high-profile signing, Angel Di Maria, was also the biggest failure.

■ United's early summer signings – Bastian Schweinsteiger, Morgan Schneiderlin, Italian right-back Matteo Darmian and Dutch attacker Memphis Depay – earned praise from all quarters. However, the £36m investment in Monaco teenager Anthony Martial was a surprise.

■ The debacle over David De Gea wanting to join Real Madrid left United with a season-long goalkeeping problem that could have been avoided.

Key players: German midfielder Schweinsteiger; French midfielder Schneiderlin; Spanish attacking midfielder Juan Mata.

Stadium: Old Trafford (75,000). "The Theatre of Dreams" has been United's home since 1910 – apart from a spell at City's Maine Road, from 1941-49.

■ TACTICS

With Robin Van Persie gone, Rooney has been playing centre-forward, but he is more effective in a withdrawn role. Schweinsteiger and Michael Carrick can be highly productive alongside Schneiderlin.

Attacking thrust...Juan Mata

CSKA MOSCOW

Doumbia's return lifts spirits

STAR MAN

Ahmed MUSA

The 22-year-old Nigerian attacker, who can play wide or centrally, has been CSKA's main source of goals.

COACH

Leonid SLUTSKY

In charge since 2009, he was once dubbed "the Russian Mourinho" because of his lack of professional playing experience.

The Russian club qualified for the group stage for the third year running after beating Sporting Lisbon in a close play-off.

■ CSKA finished second in last season's Russian league and beat Sporting Lisbon thanks to a late Ahmed Musa goal.

■ Russian champions in 2013 and 2014, CSKA have been eclipsed by Zenit's financial power of late.

■ CSKA are owned by Yevgeni Giner, a controversial businessman and close associate of Roman Abramovich.

■ Coach Leonid Slutsky recently took on additional responsibility as coach of the Russian national side following the sacking of Fabio Capello.

■ Last season, CSKA finished bottom of their Champions League group, but they did win at Manchester City.

■ This summer, CSKA re-signed former Russian league top scorer Seydou Doumbia on loan from Roma. They also brought in highly rated Amir Natkho – who is the cousin of CSKA midfielder Bibras Natkho – from Barcelona's B team.

Key players: midfielder Roman Eremenko; Ivorian striker Doumbia; keeper and captain Igor Akinfeev.

Stadium: Khimki Arena (18,600). Currently awaiting completion of their own purpose-built stadium.

■ TACTICS

Slutsky has been criticised for his cautious approach but was not helped by the departure of Doumbia last season. The striker's return should see Musa back on the left flank. Eremenko is CSKA's main creative force and last season formed an impressive partnership in central midfield with newcomer Bibras Natkho.

Strength at the back...Georgi Schennikov (right)

WOLFSBURG

VW money powers new German force

STAR MAN

Maxi ARNOLD

The Germany international can play in a number of roles, from deep-lying midfielder to attacking playmaker.

COACH

Dieter HECKING

A former trainee policeman, he is Germany's current coach of the year and recently extended his contract until 2018.

Wolfsburg are the new force in the Bundesliga. Backed by car-maker Volkswagen's millions, they finished second in the league last season. However, their summer preparations were disturbed by Kevin De Bruyne's departure to Manchester City.

■ Wolfsburg's European pedigree is limited. They have made one previous appearance in the Champions League group stages, in 2009-10, when they dropped into the Europa League, eventually reaching the quarter-finals.

■ After a summer of brinkmanship, they eventually sold star performer De Bruyne, while Ivan Perisic also moved on, joining Internazionale. They re-invested in Schalke's Julian Draxler and Brazilian defender Dante from Bayern Munich.

■ Sporting director Klaus Allofs has been a key figure in the club's recent success, but Wolfsburg have been criticised for being a "plastic" club whose main attacking weapon is the cheque book.

Key players: Swiss left-back Ricardo Rodriguez; Dutch centre-forward Bas Dost; midfielder Draxler.

Stadium: Volkswagen Arena (26,000). The 30,000 capacity for Bundesliga matches is reduced on European nights.

■ TACTICS

Hecking is no tactical innovator, but he does know how to assemble a well-balanced unit and is just as capable of taking the expansive route as soaking up pressure and explosively hitting on the break. Both full-backs can push on and the front-four constantly swap positions. Central-defensive commander Naldo and midfield holder Luiz Gustavo are the Brazilian glue which holds it all together.

Commanding presence...Naldo

BENFICA

Eagles upset by Jesus switch

STAR MAN

JONAS

The 31-year-old Brazilian forward was Benfica's top scorer last season, following a summer move from Spain's Valencia.

COACH

Rui VITORIA

A one-time Benfica youth coach, he enjoyed success with Vitoria Guimaraes last season, taking them to fifth place.

It was a dramatic summer in Lisbon after Benfica retained the Portuguese title for the first time in 31 years but then lost coach Jorge Jesus, who failed to agree a new contract and joined city rivals Sporting.

■ Jesus had overseen Benfica's re-emergence as the dominant power in Portuguese football, displacing Porto with a brand of exciting, attacking football that featured a mix of experienced foreign players and talented youngsters.

■ Benfica turned to Vitoria Guimaraes coach Rui Vitoria and made some interesting choices in the transfer market, such as Mexican forward Raul Jimenez (Atletico Madrid). Concerns over injuries and attitude mean the jury is out over Kostas Mitroglu (Fulham) and Adel Taarabt (QPR).

■ Brazilian forward Jonas remains the club's main hope for goals – if his team-mates can be creative enough to supply him. Similarly, there are worries over the right-back berth, where Nelson Semedo has been promoted from the B team following Maxi Pereira's switch to Porto.

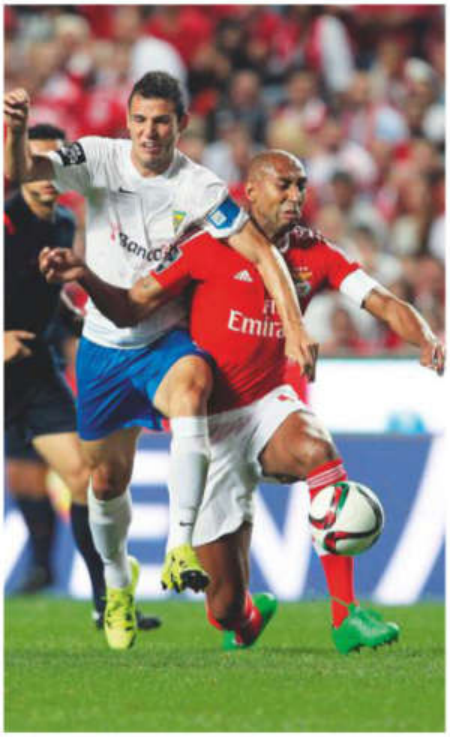
■ Benfica lost to Zenit and Bayer Leverkusen and finished bottom of last season's Champions League group.

Key players: captain and centre-back Luisao; Argentinian midfielder Nicolas Gaitan; Brazilian attacker Talisca.

Stadium: Estadio da Luz (65,647). Built for the 2004 European Championship.

■ TACTICS

Vitoria began the domestic season with Mitroglu alongside Jonas in attack, but he may be more conservative in the Champions League, with an extra defensive **midfielder.**



Competitive...club captain Luisao (right) leads by example

ATLETICO MADRID

Spain's third force demand to be taken seriously

STAR MAN

Antoine GRIEZMANN

An exceptional first season prompted Atletico to put a new €80m release clause in his contract to see off potential suitors.

COACH

Diego SIMEONE

In charge since 2011 and is now contracted until 2020, his demanding approach has taken Atletico to new heights.

Under Diego Simeone, Atletico have become a credible third force in Spanish football – an astonishing feat given the financial gulf between them and Barcelona and Real Madrid.

■ Atletico lost to city rivals Real in last season's quarter-finals in a repeat of the 2014 Final that Simeone's side were within minutes of winning.

■ Over the summer, Atletico lost some key figures: midfielder Arda Turan joined Barcelona, defender Miranda left for Internazionale, midfielder Mario Suarez joined Fiorentina and striker Mario Mandzukic was sold to Juventus.

■ The proceeds have been invested wisely in Jackson Martinez from Porto; left-back Filipe Luis, back from Chelsea; centre-half Stefan Savic from Fiorentina; 21-year-old Argentina striker Luciano Vietto from Villarreal; and Portuguese winger Yannick Ferreira Carrasco from Monaco.

Key players: Uruguay international Diego Godin is the linchpin in defence; club captain Gabi is vital in midfield; Colombia striker Martinez brings pace and power.

■ **Stadium:** Vicente Calderon (54,000). Construction has begun on a new 70,000-seat arena on the site of the current La Peineta athletics stadium in the east of the city.

■ TACTICS

Simeone's Atletico are highly organised when they lose the ball, with special emphasis placed on energetic tackling and the quick recovery of possession. Jose Gimenez or Savic will replace Miranda at the back, while Ferreira Carrasco adds pace on the flanks. Simeone has exciting attacking options in Fernando Torres, Vietto, Oliver Torres and Angel Correa.

Pace...new signing Yannick Ferreira Carrasco (right)

GALATASARAY

Turkish champions still seeking a step up in quality

STAR MAN

Wesley SNEIJDER

The Dutch midfielder joined in January 2013 from Internazionale, where he was a Champions League winner in 2010.

COACH

Hamza HAMZAOGLU

Previously steered Akhisar Belediyespor to the Turkish top flight and was an assistant to national coach Fatih Terim.

Galatasaray have been champions of Turkey for three of the past four seasons but have struggled to transfer their domestic superiority into a strong European challenge.

■ Gala finished bottom of their group last season, with just one point, after home and away defeats by Arsenal and Borussia Dortmund. Defeat to Anderlecht prompted the sacking of coach Cesare Prandelli.

■ Summer transfer activity has been underwhelming. Lukas Podolski was the big catch, from Arsenal. He joined ex-Real Madrid midfielder Jose Rodriguez and midfielder Bilal Kisa from coach Hamza Hamzaoglu's old team, Akhisar Belediyespor.

■ The departures of Brazilians Felipe Melo and Alex Telles to Internazionale, despite Melo agreeing a new contract earlier in the summer, highlighted concerns that Gala have not reinforced sufficiently for the Champions League campaign. The failed, late registration of Kevin Grosskreutz's transfer from Borussia Dortmund only added to supporters' frustrations.

Key players: Uruguayan goalkeeper Fernando Muslera; Cameroon centre-back Aurelien Chedjou; international striker Burak Yilmaz.

Stadium: Turk Telecom Arena (52,695). Opened in 2011 but lacks the atmosphere of the Ali Sami Yen Arena.

■ TACTICS

Hamzaoglu's side are most effective when playing as a counter-attacking unit. A poor start to the Turkish league campaign highlighted a lack of dynamism in central midfield, where captain Selcuk Inan and new signing Bilal are expected to start ahead of Rodriguez.

Star signing...Lukas Podolski arrived from Arsenal

ASTANA

Group stage debutants have huge financial backing

STAR MAN

Tanat NUSSERBAYEV

Club captain and Kazakhstan international, the 28-year-old striker is a nippy penalty-box operator.

COACH

Stanimir STOILOV

This is his second time in the group stage, having been coach of Levski Sofia for their 2006-07 Champions League campaign.

The Kazakh champions are the first club from their country ever to compete in the group stage of the Champions League.

■ Astana beat APOEL of Cyprus in the play-off round after victories over Slovenian champions Maribor and HJK of Finland.

■ Founded in 2009 to promote the city of Astana, the club is state-backed and owned by Kazakhstan's sovereign-wealth fund, which also owns the postal system and the state oil and gas company KazMunayGas, as well as banks, mines, airlines, airports, and the country's railways. The fund is worth $75billion, so technically Astana are one of the wealthiest clubs in the Champions League

■ Astana replaced Almaty as the country's capital in 1997. Almaty's leading club, Kairat, were regulars in the old Supreme Soviet League.

■ Astana have an annual budget of $30m and pay monthly wages of between $40,000 and $50,000. They have recruited players from Colombia, Serbia, Ghana and Ukraine, as well as from the national side.

Key players: Right-sided attacking midfielder Bauyrzhan Dzholchiev; Kazach attacker Georgy Zhukov; Ghana midfielder Patrick Twumasi.

Stadium: Astana Arena (30,000). Has a retractable roof and was opened in 2009.

■ TACTICS

While Stoilov insists on a possession game and an abundance of attacking intent on the domestic front, he will rely on stout defence and living off scraps in Europe. But there are goalscoring threats from midfield in Dzholchiev and Nemanja Maksimovic.

Goal threat...Serb midfielder Nemanja Maksimovic

JUVENTUS

All change for last season's beaten finalists

STAR MAN

Paul POGBA

The 22-year-old French midfielder has huge responsibility on his shoulders after he requested and got the number 10 shirt.

COACH

Massimiliano ALLEGRI

Won the league title in his first season with Milan in 2011 and did the same after replacing Antonio Conte at Juventus.

Juve were the undisputed power in Serie A last season, comfortably retaining their title as well as surprising many by reaching the Champions League Final. But they have experienced major changes in personnel this summer.

■ They started the new season without Andrea Pirlo, Arturo Vidal and Carlos Tevez – arguably the core of the team last year – and lost the first two Serie A games of the season for the first time in their history.

■ Mario Mandzukic (Atletico Madrid), Sami Khedira (Real Madrid), Paulo Dybala (Palermo), Alex Sandro (Porto), Juan Cuadrado (Chelsea), Hernanes (Internazionale) and Mario Lemina (Marseille) have all arrived.

■ Juventus have coped with losses before. In 1985, after their European Cup win, Paolo Rossi, Marco Tardelli and Zbigniew Boniek all left. But Massimiliano Allegri faces a challenge to bed in the new signings.

Key players: keeper and captain Gianluigi Buffon; versatile Italy midfielder Claudio Marchisio; centre-back Giorgio Chiellini.

Stadium: Juventus Stadium (41,254). Built on the site of the old Stadio delle Alpi and opened in 2011.

■ TACTICS

Allegri began the new league season playing with a 3-5-2 formation, using Stephan Lichtsteiner and Patrice Evra as wing-backs, but he could revert to a back four in Europe, with Sandro coming in on the left. Khedira, Marchisio and Simone Padoin can all play in Pirlo's deep role, while there are plenty of options up front, with the addition of Mandzukic and Dybala, as well as Alvaro Morata.

Option...the signing of Paulo Dybala adds choice up front

MANCHESTER CITY

Despite the millions spent, City have failed to crack Europe

STAR MAN

Sergio AGUERO

The Argentinian had a busy summer at the Copa America and he went into the new season amid concerns he was not fully fit.

COACH

Manuel PELLEGRINI

The Chilean appeared vulnerable after City missed out on silverware last season, but he agreed a new contract this summer.

City beat Bayern Munich and Roma in last season's group stage, but defeat by Barcelona in the round of 16 offered a reminder that the free-flowing tactics with which they can outscore Premier League opponents do not always work in Europe.

■ Manuel Pellegrini's future was in doubt after last season's second-place Premier League finish but the lack of replacements – with Pep Guardiola and Diego Simeone committed to Bayern and Atletico Madrid respectively – kept him in a job.

■ City enjoyed a strong, if expensive, summer in the transfer market. Kevin De Bruyne was a £53m arrival from Wolfsburg, while Raheem Sterling cost £49m from Liverpool. Centre-back Nicolas Otamendi arrived from Valencia while Fabian Delph, did a u-turn to sign from Aston Villa. Fringe players were moved on: James Milner left for Liverpool and Edin Dzeko joined Roma on loan, while Stevan Jovetic returned to Italy, to Internazionale, on loan.

■ City began the Premier League in impressive style but if they are to succeed, they need their key figures to either stay fit (Sergio Aguero) or return to their 2013-14 form (Yaya Toure and Vincent Kompany).

Key players: midfielder David Silva; midfielder Toure; captain Kompany.

Stadium: Etihad Stadium (55,097). City moved here from their old Maine Road ground in 2003.

■ TACTICS

City's attack has pace and skill in abundance, while Fernandinho and Toure offer power from midfield. Otamendi could edge out Mangala, while Wilfried Bony is a strong reserve attacking option from the bench.

Important...Vincent Kompany (left) and David Silva

SEVILLA

Europa League winners take their place

STAR MAN

Fernando LLORENTE

The striker is back in Spain after two seasons with Juventus where he dropped down the pecking order this summer.

COACH

Unai EMERY

Under contract until 2017, the ex-Valencia boss has overseen back-to-back Europa League titles since joining in 2013.

The Andalusians are the first club to have qualified for the Champions League as winners of the Europa League after they beat Dnipro in last year's Final to win back-to-back titles.

■ Sevilla lost two key figures from last season's Europa League win in striker Carlos Bacca (Milan) and full-back Aleix Vidal (Barcelona).

■ There were plenty of new arrivals: Spanish striker Fernando Llorente (Juventus), Italian striker Ciro Immobile (loan from Borussia Dortmund), Ukrainian winger Yevhen Konoplyanka (Dnipro), midfielders Steven Nzonzi (Stoke City) and Michael Krohn-Dehli (Celta Vigo), plus defenders Adil Rami (Milan), Mariano (Bordeaux) and Sergio Escudero (Getafe).

■ Sevilla also agreed a permanent deal with Chelsea for much-travelled French midfielder Gail Kakuta.

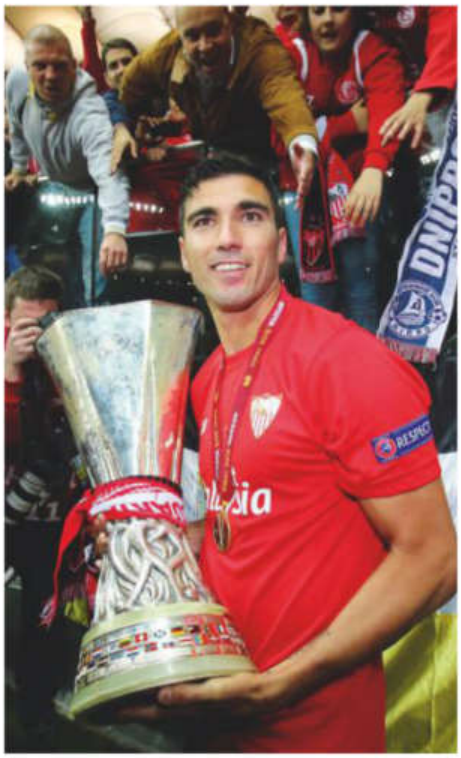
■ Overall, it was another good summer's business by sporting director Monchi. The sales of Bacca and Vidal brought in €47m, while the new arrivals cost in the region of €25m.

Key players: Polish defender Grzegorz Krychowiak; captain and winger Jose Antonio Reyes; attacking midfielder Vicente Iborra.

Stadium: Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan (42,500). Sevilla had lost only three European games at home before the start of this season.

■ TACTICS

Emery prefers a counter-attacking formation with plenty of flair on the flanks. New signing Krohn-Dehli offers an alternative option in central midfield, while Konoplyanka could replace Reyes on the wing. Llorente will compete with Kevin Gameiro and Immobile for the central attacking role.



Europa League winner...Jose Antonio Reyes

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH

First Champions League appearance for 70s powerhouse

STAR MAN

Patrick HERRMANN

The midfielder has broken into the senior Germany squad and recently extended his Gladbach contract until 2019.

COACH

Lucien FAVRE

Made his name with Servette and Zurich in his native Switzerland, and Hertha Berlin. Could succeed Pep Guardiola at Bayern.

Under Swiss coach Lucien Favre, Gladbach have become a revived force in German football, finishing third in the Bundesliga last season. Favre rescued the club from relegation in 2011 and has turned them around over the past four years.

■ Apart from a defeat by Dynamo Kiev in the 2012 Champions League qualifying round, their European experience over the past decade has been limited to the Europa League.

■ Gladbach sold striker Max Kruse to Wolfsburg over the summer, while on-loan defensive midfielder Christoph Kramer returned to Bayer Leverkusen.

■ Swiss striker Josip Drmic (€10m, Bayer Leverkusen) was Gladbach's biggest summer deal, while they also signed under-21 defender Nico Schulz from Hertha Berlin. Danish defender Andreas Christensen joined on a season-long loan from Chelsea.

■ Earlier in the year, Gladbach agreed a permanent deal with Chelsea for on-loan midfielder Thorgan Hazard, who is the younger brother of Chelsea star Eden.

Key players: Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka; Belgian midfielder Thorgan Hazard; Brazilian attacker Raffael.

Stadium: Borussia Park (46,249). Opened in 2004 and has "safe standing" for around 16,000.

■ TACTICS

Meticulously set-up, Gladbach are one of the best counter-attacking teams in Europe. They flood forward at pace and in numbers, and are incisive on the flanks. While Drmic offers a more conventional option at centre-forward, Favre has been experimenting with a pair of mobile false nines in Hazard and Raffael. Defensively, they sit very deep.

Missing out...Josip Drmic could find himself on the bench

BARCELONA

Catalans leap from crisis to record-breakers

STAR MAN

Lionel MESSI

Continues to delight and amaze, with his two free-kick goals in the UEFA Super Cup confirming his status as the world's best.

COACH

Luis ENRIQUE

One of the few to play for both Barca and Real. Struggling in January but agreed a new contract in June, following the treble.

The current European champions swept all before them last season and added the UEFA Super Cup in August with a 5-4 victory over Sevilla.

■ Defeat to Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Super Cup ended hopes of repeating the club's record six-trophy haul of 2009, although Barca can still add the Club World Cup when they travel to Japan in December.

■ In January, president Josep Maria Bartomeu called early elections amid criticism of his leadership. The club lost an appeal against a transfer ban and there were reports of a rift between Lionel Messi and Luis Enrique. This summer, with *socios* still celebrating the treble, Bartomeu was re-elected.

■ The club remains under the transfer embargo until January 2016, but deals were still agreed with Aleix Vidal (Sevilla) and Arda Turan (Atletico Madrid), even though neither can play until the new year.

■ Midfielder Xavi was the summer departure, joining Qatar club Al Sadd, while Pedro was sold to Chelsea.

Key players: Sergio Busquets is the midfield lynchpin; Ivan Rakitic has replaced Andres Iniesta as the key creative link with the attack; Luis Suarez works tirelessly across the front line.

Stadium: Camp Nou (99,354). Europe's biggest stadium and the second largest football arena in the world in terms of capacity.

■ TACTICS

Barca are more direct under Enrique than his predecessor, Gerardo Martino. They get the ball forward quickly to the front three, normally via Rakitic, who is an increasingly important influence. Neymar plays wide on the left, while Messi frequently cuts in from the right.

Tireless...Luis Suarez works across the whole front line

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Impressive play-off win sealed place

STAR MAN

Hakan CALHANOGLU

The 21-year-old German-born Turkey international is a talented playmaker and renowned free-kick specialist.

COACH

Roger SCHMIDT

Toughened up Leverkusen last term during his first season in charge and can be a fiery presence on the touchline.

The 2002 finalists beat tough opponents Lazio in the play-offs to reach the group stage.

■ Leverkusen, who are funded by the Bayer drugs company, finished fourth in the Bundesliga last season.

■ They won home and away against Zenit in last season's group stage to reach the last 16, where they lost on penalties to Atletico Madrid.

■ The Germans had a busy summer in the transfer market. World Cup winner Christoph Kramer is back after a loan at Borussia Monchengladbach, while midfielder Gonzalo Castro moved to Borussia Dortmund.

■ Chilean midfielder Charles Aranguiz joined from Internacional of Brazil but suffered a serious Achilles injury soon after signing.

■ The defence was tightened up with Jonathan Tah arriving from Hamburg and a permanent deal for Kyriakos Papadopoulos.

■ Korean striker Son Heung-min was sold to Tottenham Hotspur, but Javier Hernandez (Manchester United), Kevin Kampl (Dortmund) and Swiss forward Admir Mehmedi (Freiburg) have increased the attacking options.

Key players: midfielder Kramer; captain Sven Bender; winger Karim Bellarabi.

Stadium: Bay Arena (30,000). Is in the process of becoming a UEFA five-star stadium.

■ TACTICS

Schmidt likes to play a hard-pressing game and often switches to a 4-2-3-1 with a lone striker. The new signings give him more options, although central midfielder Aranguiz is out injured until March. Kampl will be back up to Bellarabi on the right flank.

Back...Christoph Kramer (right) spent two years at Gladbach

ROMA

Back problems could hinder progress

STAR MAN

Daniele DE ROSSI

The 32-year-old central midfielder has spent all his pro career with the club and is Serie A's highest-paid player.

COACH

Rudi GARCIA

The Frenchman held on to his job this summer despite a disappointing second season in charge.

Roma are established as the second-strongest side in Serie A, behind Juventus, but they have struggled to impress in the Champions League.

■ Roma had hoped to challenge Juve last season but their season petered out. In the Champions League, they were thrashed 7-1 by Bayern Munich in the group stage, then lost to Fiorentina in the last 16 of the Europa League.

■ They had a busy summer in the transfer market, signing Edin Dzeko (Manchester City, loan), Mohamed Salah (Chelsea, loan), Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal, loan), Iago Falque (Genoa) and Lucas Digne (PSG, loan).

■ Under-21 defender Alessio Romagnoli was sold to Milan, while Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa went to Lyon. Ashley Cole's contract was cancelled and Ivorian forward Seydou Doumbia went on loan to CSKA Moscow.

■ The new signings will bring a much needed cutting edge to an attack that was blunt for much of last season.

Roma will be boosted by Leandro Castan's return from injury but midfielder Kevin Strootman remains sidelined.

Key players: Ivorian attacker Gervinho; Bosnian midfielder Miralem Pjanic; Greek centre-back Kostas Manolas.

Stadium: The Stadio Olimpico (72,000). The club's American owners have ambitious plans for a new stadium.

■ TACTICS

The arrival of Digne will help with a defence that lacks strength in depth. The loan signing of Dzeko may see a tactical change from the usual 4-3-3 at times, while these days Francesco Totti – who turns 39 on September 27 – will start on the bench.

Change...Edin Dzeko's arrival may see a tactical switch

BATE

In the group stage for a fourth time in five years

STAR MAN

Alexander HLEB

The former Arsenal and Barcelona midfielder, now 34, recently returned for his third spell at the club.

COACH

Aleksandr YERMAKOVICH

Former midfielder who made the step up from assistant coach to take the head role in October 2013.

The only Belarusian team to have ever qualified for the group stage of the Champions League.

■ BATE have been champions of Belarus for the past nine seasons. They beat Dundalk, Videoton and Partizan Belgrade in the qualifiers.

■ The club was formed in 1973 as the works team of Borisov Automobile and Tractor parts factory, hence the BATE acronym.

■ Although rivals Dinamo Minsk were regular participants in the Soviet League, BATE have established themselves as the leading team in post-independence Belarus despite being based in the town of Borisov (population 145,000)

■ Last season, they finished bottom of their Champions League group after suffering five defeats.

■ The club is run on a sustainable basis and players are regularly sold to wealthier clubs in Ukraine, Russia and western Europe. In the past year Egor Filipenko went to Malaga (Spain), Sergey Krivets to Metz (France), and Anri Khagush to Arsenal Tula (Russia).

Key players: defender Denis Polyakov; striker and captain Vitali Rodionov; midfielder Ihar Stasevich.

Stadium: Borisov Arena (13,126). BATE moved into their brand new home last year and previously had to play their home games in the Dinamo Arena in Minsk because their old stadium did not meet UEFA standards.

■ TACTICS

In the Belarusian league, BATE often play 4-3-3, but on the European stage they prefer to play on the counter attack. They could even play three central defenders.

Qualification...Ihar Stasevich (left) in action against Dundalk

BAYERN MUNICH

Undisputed number one in the Bundesliga

STAR MAN

Arjen ROBBEN

The Dutch winger was troubled by injury for much of last season but remains Bayern's most explosive attacker.

COACH

Pep GUARDIOLA

Hoping to land Bayern an unprecedented fourth successive Bundesliga title, but may not stay beyond this season.

Bayern won last season's Bundesliga at a canter, but defeat to Barcelona in the Champions League semi-final hurt, especially as it followed a heavy loss to Real Madrid in 2014.

■ Uncertainty surrounds the future of coach Pep Guardiola as his contract expires next summer and Manchester City are keen to lure him to England.

■ During the summer he was criticised by ex-Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld for signing too many Spanish-speaking players – a policy that has continued with the capture of Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal.

■ Bayern's financial power was again demonstrated this summer with deals for Vidal (Juventus) and Douglas Costa (Shakhtar Donetsk). Highly rated under-21 midfielder Joshua Kimmich arrived from Stuttgart.

■ An early-season injury to Mehdi Benatia highlighted Bayern's lack of central defensive options, though Guardiola may try to make a virtue of the situation by playing more midfielders. Holger Badstuber and Javi Martinez are fragile and often injured, while Dante has been sold to Wolfsburg.

Key players: intelligent forward Thomas Muller; versatile captain Philipp Lahm; sweeper-keeper Manuel Neuer.

Stadium: Allianz Arena (75,000). Shared with city rivals 1860 Munich.

■ TACTICS

Guardiola's possession game allows a variety of midfield options to flourish. Robert Lewandowski is a more conventional target man than Muller, who can also play further forward, allowing the likes of Thiago Alcantara or Mario Gotze to come in. Douglas Costa will start in the absence of long-term injury concern Franck Ribery.

Addition...Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal

ARSENAL

Struggling to overcome tag of European underachievers

STAR MAN

Alexis SANCHEZ

The Chilean gave Arsenal's attack a new sense of purpose last term, but the summer's Copa America may have left him tired.

COACH

Arsene WENGER

Next year will be his 20th in charge of Arsenal and he shows little sign of retiring, but a European trophy still eludes him.

Under Arsene Wenger, Arsenal have qualified for the Champions League for 18 successive seasons, reaching the Final just once, in 2006, when they lost to Barcelona.

■ There was disappointment again last term when Arsenal lost to Monaco in the knockout stage. Now they face Bayern Munich – who knocked them out in 2013 and 2014.

■ Despite the high-spending ways of Chelsea and others, Wenger has maintained Arsenal's position within the top four of English football. He remains committed to bringing through young players, often in preference to expensive trophy signings.

■ Although the club's owners insist money is available, the biggest summer deal was for goalkeeper Petr Cech (£10m, Chelsea).

■ Weaknesses include a tendency to overpass, a lack of killer instinct and no dominant holding midfielder.

Key players: Spanish midfielder Santi Cazorla has thrived since dropping deeper during games; Welsh midfielder Aaron Ramsey can fill a number of roles; German attacking midfielder Mesut Ozil is a potential match-winner but can be inconsistent.

Stadium: Emirates (60,434). Tickets remain some of the most expensive in English football. The atmosphere is better on European nights than Premier League afternoons.

■ TACTICS

Francis Coquelin and Cazorla sit in central midfield, while Ozil, Ramsey and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain offer options further forward as they are all capable of playing wide. Olivier Giroud is the lone striker, but Theo Walcott can play as a central striker or wide right.

Match-winner...but Mesut Ozil can be inconsistent

OLYMPIAKOS

In the group stage again, despite match-fixing allegations

STAR MAN

Alejandro DOMINGUEZ

Veteran Argentinian playmaker who is nicknamed "*El Chori*" (the thief), the 34-year-old agreed a new contract this summer.

COACH

Marco SILVA

The Portuguese was hired in the summer when sacked by Sporting Lisbon after one season. Made his name with Estoril.

The Greek champions will be competing in the group stage for the 19th consecutive season despite an ongoing match-fixing scandal.

■ Club owner Vangelis Mariniakos is banned from all football activity because of match-fixing allegations. UEFA insists it does not have enough evidence to prevent Olympiakos from taking part in the Champions League, despite parallels with Fenerbahce, whose two-year ban from European competition ended this season.

■ Participation in the Champions League has helped Olympiakos avoid the fallout from the Greek financial crisis. This season they will receive €25m from UEFA, up from the €20.4m they received last season.

■ Olympiakos were one of the most active clubs in the European transfer market with new coach Marco Silva bringing in Argentinian midfielder Esteban Cambiasso (Leicester City), Icelandic striker Albert Finnbogason (Real Sociedad), Colombian winger Felipe Pardo (Braga), Serb midfielder Luka Milivojevic (Anderlecht), Moroccan centre-back Manuel Da Costa (Sivasspor), Nigerian striker Brown Ideye (West Brom) and Portuguese winger Hernani (Porto).

Key players: captain and keeper Roberto; Icelandic forward Finnbogason; Norwegian right-back Omar Elabdellaoui.

Stadium: Georgios Karaiskakis (33,000). Situated in Piraeus, near Athens.

■ TACTICS

The sheer number of signings mean Silva can field virtually a new team this season, although there is a worry over lack of quality at centre-back.

Welcome...Luka Milivojevic is one of a raft of new signings

DINAMO ZAGREB

Dominant domestically but too conservative in Europe

STAR MAN

Angelo HENRIQUEZ

The attacker signed after a loan spell from Manchester United last season and won the Copa America with Chile this summer.

COACH

Zoran MAMIC

The former Dinamo defender has been in charge since November 2013 and is the younger brother of club owner Zdravko.

The Croatian league champions for the past 10 successive seasons will be taking part in the group stage for only the third time.

■ Dinamo qualified by beating Albania's Skenderbeu in the play-offs, following wins over Molde of Norway and Luxembourg's Fola Esch in earlier qualifying rounds.

■ The home of controversial club president Zdravko Mamic was raided this summer in ongoing investigations into commissions on transfer fees. In recent years, the club has been involved in most of the transfers involving Croatia's biggest stars, from Luka Modric to Alen Halilovic.

■ Dinamo's latest starlets are Marko Pjaca and Ante Coric, both attacking midfielders.

■ This summer, Dinamo signed midfielder Marko Rog from RNK Split for €5m, the biggest-ever fee between two Croatian clubs. The club also agreed a permanent deal with Manchester United for striker Angelo Henriquez, who was on loan last season. Croatia international defender Gordon Schildenfeld returned to Zagreb as a replacement for Celtic-bound Jozo Simunovic.

Key players: midfielder Rog; Algerian wide attacker El Arbi Hilel Soudani; attacking midfielder Pjaca.

Stadium: Maksimir (35,000). Also home to the Croatian national side.

■ TACTICS

Mamic can be frustratingly rigid in his thinking – especially in his failure to encourage more drive from his holding midfielders – and content to play at too slow a tempo. Dinamo's strongest suit is in attacking midfield, where Soudani and Rog can thrive.

Great expectations...attacking midfielder Marko Pjaca

CHELSEA

Pressure on for ambitious Blues and Mourinho

STAR MAN

Eden HAZARD

Chelsea's key attacking outlet and undisputed player of last season – despite a tendency to go to ground very easily.

COACH

Jose MOURINHO

Won the Champions League with Porto and Inter, and won the Premier League in his second season back in England.

After the disappointment of losing to Paris Saint-Germain in the round of 16 in last season's competition, more will be expected of the English champions this time.

■ Chelsea were comfortably the best team in the Premier League last season but their early campaign this term was beset by problems, with defeats by Arsenal and Manchester City.

■ Their summer transfer business was mixed. They beat Manchester United to the signing of Pedro from Barcelona and Asmir Begovic came in as keeper cover following Petr Cech's sale to Arsenal. Ghana left-back Baba Rahman arrived from Augsburg.

■ Chelsea need Diego Costa to stay fit as Mourinho faces a challenge in getting the best from striker Radamel Falcao, on loan from Monaco, who failed to spark at Manchester United last season.

■ There are concerns over an ageing, static defence, prompting their pursuit of Everton's John Stones.

■ Will Chelsea suffer third-season syndrome with Mourinho? He insists he is there for the long haul, but past experiences (Porto, Chelsea, Real Madrid) suggest otherwise.

Key players: midfielder Cesc Fabregas; captain John Terry; striker Costa.

Stadium: Stamford Bridge (41,798). The club announced plans in June for an expansion of the current stadium capacity to 60,000.

■ TACTICS

Pedro gives an injection of pace on the right to complement Eden Hazard's trickery on the left. Willian has been preferred to Oscar in an attacking formation; more defensive options include Ramires and John Obi Mikel.

Strike power...but Diego Costa has fitness issues

PORTO

Making money but struggling for silverware

STAR MAN

Vincent ABOUBAKAR

The 23-year-old Cameroon centre-forward will be tasked with filling the boots of the recently departed Martinez.

COACH

Julen LOPETEGUI

A former goalkeeper with Real and Barca who enjoyed success in charge of Spain's under-19 and under-21 sides.

The club from Portugal's second city, Oporto, have endured two trophyless seasons since they last won the league title in 2013.

■ Porto topped their Champions League group last season and beat Bayern Munich 3-1 in the first leg of the quarter-final, before the Germans rallied to win the return 6-1.

■ Porto have sold an incredible amount of talent over the past decade, with conservative estimates that the club has made more than €750m in player sales since 2004.

■ The departures continued this summer with the sales of Jackson Martinez (Atletico Madrid), Danilo (Real Madrid), Alex Sandro (Juventus), Oliver Torres (Atletico Madrid, loan return), Casemiro (Real Madrid) and Ricardo Quaresma (Besiktas).

■ The major summer signing was midfielder Giannelli Imbula from Marseille for €20m. Uruguay full-back Maxi Pereira joined from rivals Benfica on a free, while keeper Iker Casillas bade a tearful fare to Real Madrid. Left-back Aly Cissokho arrived on loan from Aston Villa.

Key players: Mexican midfielder Hector Herrera; French midfielder Imbula; Spanish attacker Cristian Tello, who is on loan from Barcelona.

Stadium: Estadio do Dragao (50,035). Was rebuilt for Euro 2004.

■ TACTICS

Spaniard Lopetegui brought a new approach last season, with a more possession-based game. There's plenty of competition in midfield, with Sergio Oliveira, Andre Andre, Ruben Neves, Hector Herrera and Evaldo all pushing for a place. Algerian winger Yacine Brahimi is an option from the bench.

Strong defence...Maxi Pereira has arrived from Benfica

DYNAMO KIEV

Ambitious club from the capital are back on top at home

STAR MAN

Andriy YARMOLENKO

The biggest star in domestic Ukrainian football, the winger has been heavily linked with a move to western Europe.

COACH

Serhiy REBROV

The former Dynamo and Ukraine forward has revitalised the club, aided by his Spanish assistant Raul Riancho.

Last season's Ukrainian double winners are back in the ascendency after the civil war-enforced decline of Shakhtar Donetsk.

■ With Shakhtar forced to flee their home city of Donetsk, Dynamo took full advantage to claim the league and cup double last season. Dynamo were undefeated throughout the whole of the domestic campaign and beat Shakhtar in the Cup Final. They also reached the quarter-finals of the Europa League.

■ Although Dutch attacker Jeremain Lens was sold to Sunderland, they made plenty of new signings in anticipation of the Champions League group stages. Brazilian striker Junior Moraes joined from Metalurh Donetsk, along with right-back Mykola Morozyuk. Serbian midfielder Radosav Petrovic was signed from Turkey's Genclerbirligi, while Paraguayan winger Derlis Gonzalez from Basle is a potential long-term replacement for winger Andriy Yarmolenko.

Key players: Portuguese midfielder Miguel Veloso; Brazilian striker Moraes; Austrian defender Aleksandar Dragovic.
Stadium: Olimpiyskiy stadium (83,000). European games are played at this arena, which was redeveloped for Euro 2012.

■ TACTICS

Rebrov favours an attack-minded 4-1-4-1 formation, with Serhiy Rybalka anchoring the midfield to allow the wide men and attacking midfielders to support lone striker Moraes. Veloso is the team's free-kick specialist, while new signing Gonzalez provides another option out on the flank and Artem Kravets is an alternative for the centre-forward role.

Winner...Oleksandr Shovkovskiy lifts the Ukrainian Cup

MACCABI TEL AVIV

New coach will keep things tight

STAR MAN

Eran ZAHAVI

The top scorer in the Israeli league for the past two seasons, he played for Hapoel Tel Aviv in the 2010-11 group stage.

COACH

Slavisa JOKANOVIC

Serb who guided Watford to promotion to the Premier League last season but left this summer following a contract dispute.

The Israeli champions are in the group stage for only the second time.

■ Israel's most successful club edged out Basle on away goals in the play-offs after earlier wins over Hibernians of Malta and Czech side Viktoria Plzen.

■ Last season, Maccabi lost to Maribor in the Champions League third qualifying round, leading to the departure of coach Oscar Garcia. Spaniard Pako Ayestaran, a former assistant to Rafa Benitez, stepped in to guide them to a unique domestic treble.

■ Maccabi changed coaches again this summer. Ayestaran stepped down and in came Slavisa Jokanovic, who had been harshly sacked by Watford, for the Champions League qualifiers.

■ Maccabi's upturn in fortunes has been attributed to Canadian owner Mitch Goldhar's large investment and a management team led by sports director Jordi Cruyff.

■ The main summer signing was goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic, a World Under-20 champion with Serbia, from Red Star Belgrade. National team defender Tal Ben Haim (I) was a free transfer from Charlton Athletic, while Rade Prica, hat-trick hero of last term's Cup Final triumph, returned to Sweden.

Key players: veteran centre-back Ben Haim (I); Serbian keeper Rajkovic; striker Eden Ben Basat.
Stadium: Bloomfield (14,000). Shared with Bnei Yehuda Tel Aviv and Hapoel Tel Aviv.

■ TACTICS

Beware Jokanovic's compact side when the opposition dominates territory and possession. Their European gameplan is to keep it tight for the first hour or so, then turn the tide with extra creativity or firepower, especially via Zahavi.

Focused...attacking midfielder Tal Ben Haim (II)

ZENIT

AVB plays to defensive strengths

STAR MAN

HULK

The Brazilian was the Russian league's top scorer last season despite encountering racism in "almost every game".

COACH

Andre VILLAS-BOAS

Former Porto and Chelsea boss who took over at Zenit in March 2014 and is under contract until summer 2016.

Russian champions Zenit will be keen to improve on last season's disappointing showing in the Champions League. Andre Villas-Boas' side were criticised for being too defensive and failed to reach the knockout stage.

■ Zenit dropped into the Europa League after falling out of the Champions League last term and they beat PSV and Torino before losing to eventual winners Sevilla in the quarter-finals.

■ Zenit are Russia's richest club and enjoy backing from Gazprom, the powerful energy company who are a major UEFA and FIFA sponsor.

■ Zenit's summer transfers centred on strikers. Russia international Artem Dzyuba moved on a free from Spartak Moscow, while Venezuela international Salomon Rondon joined West Bromwich Albion. Andrey Arshavin joined Kuban Krasnodar following his release by Zenit.

Key players: captain and midfield playmaker Danny; Belgian central midfielder Javi Garcia; centre-forward Dzyuba.

Stadium: Petrovsky (21,000). Plans are well advanced to move to a new 66,000-capacity stadium next year.

■ TACTICS

Villas-Boas has been criticised for producing an efficient but uninspiring side, with too much reliance on defensive organisation and long-range shots from Hulk. The preferred formation plays to their defensive strengths, but AVB has also switched to 3-5-2 or 4-4-2 during games, with the emphasis on the full-backs getting forward to provide support for Hulk, alongside Dzyuba.

Uncompromising...Alex Witsel provides midfield strength

VALENCIA

New financial backing lifts spirits

STAR MAN

Sofiane FEGHOULI

The French-born Moroccan international can play in a number of different positions in midfield or attack.

COACH

NUNO

The former Porto keeper was appointed in summer 2014 and hired former Everton midfielder Phil Neville as his assistant.

Valencia, one of a record five Spanish teams in the group stage, are back after two seasons away.

■ The losing finalists from 2000 and 2001 finished fourth in La Liga last season and qualified for the group stage by beating Monaco in the play-off round.

■ Last season's domestic top-four finish was helped by a lack of European competition but they have since added financial muscle thanks to new owner Peter Lim, a Singapore businessman.

■ Valencia lost Argentina defender Nicolas Otamendi to Manchester City in the summer but bought Aymen Abdennour from Monaco as a replacement. Andres Guardado's loan deal to PSV was made permanent.

■ Other arrivals include Brazilian defender Aderlan Santos (Braga), Australian goalkeeper Mathew Ryan (Club Brugge), Brazilian midfielder Danilo (Braga), Belgian midfielder Zakaria Bakkali (PSV) and forward Santi Mina (Celta Vigo).

Key players: captain Dani Parejo, keeper Ryan; centre-forward Paco Alcacer.

Stadium: Mestalla (55,000). The club's previous financial crisis halted construction of the 75,000 "Nou Mestalla" in 2009, but Lim has promised to finance the completion of the half-built stadium.

■ TACTICS

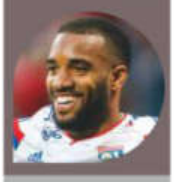
Valencia earned their victory over Monaco in the play-offs with an intense attack-minded 4-3-3 that can easily become a more conservative 4-5-1 as the wide attackers tuck into midfield. Alvaro Negredo is likely to see action as an alternative to Alcacer and Pablo Piatti is a lively wide option.

Versatile...skipper Dani Parejo gives Valencia craft and goals

LYON

New stadium suggests bright future ahead

STAR MAN



Alexandre LACAZETTE

Top scorer in Ligue 1 last season, the youth-team product snubbed offers of a move to sign a new contract.

COACH

Hubert FOURNIER

In charge of Lyon since May 2014, he earned his reputation by winning promotion to Ligue 1 with Reims.

The French Ligue runners-up are enjoying a revival, with a new stadium imminent and a thriving youth policy.

■ Lyon dominated French football in the decade before the arrival of Qatari money at Paris Saint-Germain, winning the league seven years in a row and reaching the Champions League semi-finals in 2010.

■ The club's new 61,000-seater Stade des Lumieres is due to open next year, in time to host games at Euro 2016.

■ Although the club's youth system has produced the likes of Alexandre Lacazette and Nabil Fekir in recent years, Lyon had a busy summer in the transfer market, signing defender Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa (Roma), midfielder Mathieu Valbuena (Dynamo Moscow), Brazilian full-back Rafael (Manchester United), Guadeloupe forward Claudio Beauvue (Guingamp) and defender Jeremy Morel (Marseille).

■ They balanced the books by selling Cameroon striker Clinton Njie to Tottenham Hotspur.

■ Lyon secured star striker Lacazette on a new contract, although in early Ligue 1 games he was booed by fans angry at the length of negotiations.

Key players: Franco-Algerian attacker Fekir; midfielder Valbuena; captain and midfielder Maxime Gonalons.

Stadium: Stade de Gerland (40,000). Famed for its distinctive cantilevered stands, but Lyon will move out in 2016.

■ TACTICS

In an attack-minded set-up, Gonalons anchors midfield, while Fekir plays off Lacazette as the second striker. Lyon suffered a setback when midfielder Clement Grenier suffered a thigh problem in pre-season after missing much of last season though injury.

New boy...Mathieu Valbuena arrived from Dynamo Moscow

GENT

Belgian champions prepare for first Champions League outing

STAR MAN

Moses SIMON

The Nigerian winger now has a €20m price tag, since joining from Slovakian side Trencin in January and making a big impression.

COACH

Hein VANHAEZEBROUCK

Known as VHZB, he is not a big name outside of Belgium, having made his reputation in two spells at Kortrijk.

Gent pulled off one of the shocks of the last European season, winning a first Belgian league title and ending the recent dominance of Anderlecht, who had been champions for the previous three years.

■ Gent had previously won the Belgian Cup three times but had not been seen as contenders in the end-of-season play-offs, having finished in seventh place during the regular season, 13 points behind Club Brugge.

■ Coach Hein Vanhaezebrouck, who took over last summer, transformed the club over the course of the season, bringing in unheralded youngsters from previous club Kortrijk, such as Benito Raman and Brecht Dejaegere, as well as well-travelled players such as captain Sven Kums.

■ For the Champions League campaign, the tactically versatile Vanhaezebrouck looks likely to stick with the players who proved to be greater than the sum of their parts in last year's domestic success.

One new signing was Swedish defender Erik Johansson from Malmo.

Key players: striker and top scorer Laurent Depoitre; captain Kums; Brazilian midfielder Renato Neto.

Stadium: Ghelamco Arena (20,000). Opened two years ago, it was Belgian football's first new build for 40 years.

■ TACTICS

Vanhaezebrouck favours an energetic, pressing 3-5-2 set-up, but he is not afraid to switch to a 4-5-1 if needed, with Simon playing wide on the left rather than behind Depoitre. Wing-backs Thomas Foket and Dejaegere play a key role in attacks, while the versatile Dejaegere can also play centrally, along with Raman.

Key...Brazilian midfielder Renato Neto (right)

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6 of the best Europa League stars

Nick Bidwell on some of the players to look out for in the group stage

1 Lucas SILVA

MARSEILLE

OM's success in persuading Real Madrid to loan them their 22-year-old Brazilian midfield holder was essentially the work of two men at the French club: president Vincent Labrune for his determination to beat Southampton, Napoli, Fiorentina and Valencia to the punch; and coach Michel, who as a former boss of Real's reserves, knew exactly which doors to knock on and who to lobby.

Six months after signing Lucas from Cruzeiro, Real believe a diet of regular football in Ligue 1 will do him the world of good. And in the wake of this summer's mass exodus of engine-room class from the Stade Velodrome – Giannelli Imbula, Mario Lemina, Dimitri Payet and Florian Thauvin – he will play a key role.

2 Paulo OLIVEIRA

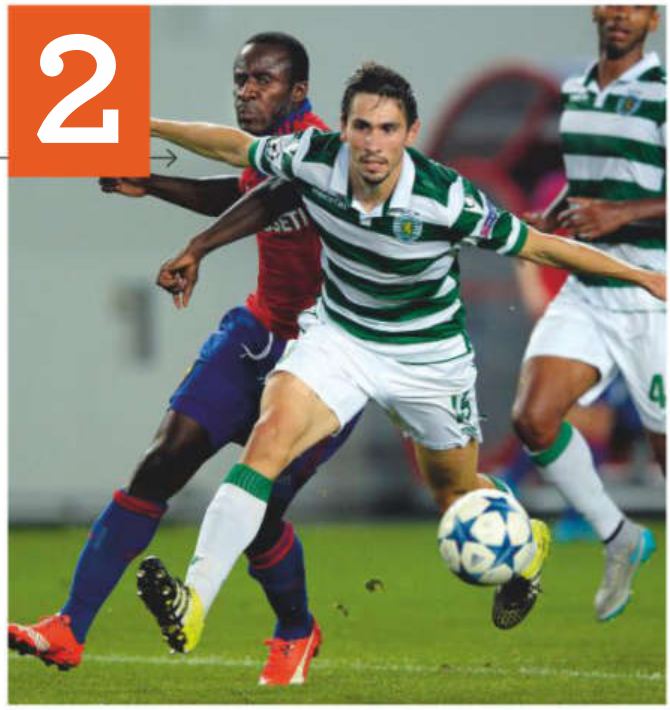
SPORTING LISBON

Now in his second season with Sporting following a move from Vitoria Guimaraes in the summer of 2014, the rangy 23-year-old centre-back is often cited as the best back-line prospect in Portugal.

He made his international debut last spring and is set to succeed one of the many thirty-somethings currently clogging up the full squad.

A Portuguese Cup winner with Vitoria in 2013 and a mainstay of various federation youth sides, he was arguably the best defender at this year's Euro Under-21s, where he was commanding in defence yet comfortable on the ball.

Under contract to Sporting until 2019, he has a massive €45m buy-out clause.



3 Marcos ALONSO

FIORENTINA

The wonderful free-kick that the Spanish left-back curled in against Milan in August should be warning enough for all Fiorentina's Europa League opponents: this 24-year-old wing-back spells dead-ball danger.

Tutored at the Real Madrid academy and boasting substantial Premier League experience with Bolton Wanderers and Sunderland, he has been in Florence since early 2013 and has a solid all-round game.

Dynamic and adventurous going forward, he is also a strong tackler. His father, simply known as Marcos, played in attack for Atletico Madrid, Barcelona and Spain, while his uncle, Marquitos, was a star defender for the all-conquering Real Madrid of the 1950s and 60s.

4 Michael DE LEEUW

GRONINGEN

Winners of the Dutch Cup for the first time in May, Groningen are back in Europe after an eight-year break and will be hoping that their main striker is as productive as he was last term, as he contributed seven goals to the cup triumph and scored 17 times in the league.

Now 28 and in the prime of his career, the former Veendam and De Graafschap centre-forward is potent in the air, hits the ball powerfully with his right foot and is dangerous when making runs to the back post.

Earlier this year, Chinese Super League side Jiangsu Sainty were set to sign him until a bank-guarantee problem scuppered the deal.

5 Philipp SCHOBESBERGER

RAPID VIENNA

An Austrian top-flight professional for little more than 12 months and only a regular starter for Rapid since March, the old-school fancy footwork right-winger is the classic overnight sensation, supplying an endless stream of goals and assists as his Viennese club secured the championship runners-up spot.

So modest and unassuming that he still rides a bike to training, last spring he became the first Rapid player to score in seven consecutive league games since the legendary Hans Krankl.

First came to prominence when helping third-tier Pasching to a fairy tale domestic cup triumph in 2013.

6 Idrissa SYLLA

ANDERLECHT

Sidelined with a groin injury for four months after joining Anderlecht from fellow Belgian outfit Zulte Waregem in a €1.5m deal in February, the Guinea striker is finally fit and firing.

Excellent in the air and at holding the ball up – his chest control is especially strong – the 24-year-old packs quite a shot with his left foot and he scored in each of the Brussels club's opening three league fixtures this season.

Began his career in France with Le Mans and played on loan at Bastia before moving to Waregem – where he was found to have one leg shorter than the other; a problem that was resolved with the insertion of special soles in his boots.

EUROPA LEAGUE 2015-16

	OVERVIEW	HONOURS	COACH
AJAX — HOLLAND — GROUP A	The **Amsterdam Arena** (53,502) had been home to four Eredivisie titles in a row until the club lost its grip on the Dutch league to PSV last season. A major overhaul may now be required.	33 / 18	Former Holland and Barcelona defender **Frank De Boer** has been in charge since December 2010.
ANDERLECHT — BELGIUM — GROUP J	Missed out on Champions League football and are rebuilding at the **Constant Vanden Stock Stadium** (21,845) after selling striker Aleksandar Mitrovic and Chancel Mbemba.	33 / 9	Former Albania international **Besnik Hasi** stepped up to take over the role of coach after six years as an assistant.
APOEL — CYPRUS — GROUP K	After a couple of years in the Champions League, fans at the **GSP Stadium** (22,859) will relish a run in the Europa League, especially after the signing of Argentinian striker Fernando Cavenaghi.	24 / 21	**Temuri Ketsbaia** replaced Domingos Paciencia, who was sacked after losing the Champions League play-off.
ASTERAS — GREECE — GROUP K	The club from the **Theodoros Kolokotronis Stadium** in Tripoli (7,616) on the Peloponnese peninsula have risen from Greece's fourth tier in less than a decade.	0 / 0	At 39, **Staikos Vergetis**, who has been in charge since 2013, is one of the Greek league's youngest coaches.
ATHLETIC BILBAO — SPAIN — GROUP L	The Basque club have enjoyed a revival in recent years, having moved to a new stadium, also called **San Mames** (53,289), in 2013. They continue to recruit only Basque players.	8 / 23	**Ernesto Valverde** is back in his second spell at Athletic and lifted the Spanish Super Cup in August.
AUGSBURG — GERMANY — GROUP L	The club with the second-smallest budget in the Bundesliga are now in their fifth season in Germany's top flight and the **WWK Arena** (30,660) is about to witness its first European campaign.	0 / 0	**Markus Weinzierl** has been in charge since 2012 and is rated among Germany's best young tacticians.
AZ — HOLLAND — GROUP L	The club from the **AFAS Stadion** (17,023) in Alkmaar won the Dutch title in 2009 under Louis Van Gaal but now have a "moneyball" approach and sell their best players every summer.	2 / 4	**John Van den Brom** steadied the ship last season after Marco Van Basten sensationally quit, citing the pressure of the job.
BASLE — SWITZERLAND — GROUP I	The dominant team in Switzerland for the past decade may be starting to lose their lustre, and Fabian Frei, Fabian Schar and Derlis Gonzalez all left **St Jakob-Park** (37,500) this summer.	18 / 11	**Urs Fischer**, became Basle's fifth coach in six years when he replaced Paulo Sousa, who left for Fiorentina this summer.

LEAGUE WINS / CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Second in the league last season, they surprisingly lost to Rapid Vienna in the third qualifying round of the Champions League and dropped into the Europa League by default.	"Ajax are Ajax," goes the saying and they always play 4-3-3 with lively wingers. Davy Klaassen is the brains of the team, while teenage defender Jairo Riedewald is an exciting prospect.	■ A rumoured summer target for Manchester United, Jasper Cillessen is Holland's number one goalkeeper. ■ Club captain **Davy Klaassen** (left) is playing a more attacking role this season. ■ Anwar El Ghazi is a right winger of Moroccan descent.
The purple-and-whites qualified directly for the group stage after finishing third in the league last season, behind Club Brugge and surprise champions Gent.	Anderlecht play 4-4-2 in the league but in Europe they go with a more conservative 4-2-3-1 default system. That places a lot on the shoulders of midfielder Dennis Praet and striker Idrissa Sylla.	■ Midfielder starlet Youri Tielemans is still only 18 years old. ■ The current Belgian player of the year, 21-year-old midfielder Dennis Praet is now playing as a central playmaker. ■ Central midfielder **Steven Defour**. ■ Guinea striker Idrissa Sylla.
Cypriot champions for the past three seasons, APOEL dropped into the Europa League after losing to Astana of Kazakhstan 2-1 on aggregate in the Champions League play-off round.	Despite his past as a winger with Newcastle United and Georgia, Temuri Ketsbaia prefers a 4-2-3-1 with the emphasis on neutralising the opposition and waiting to pounce on the counter.	■ Much-travelled veteran Argentinian striker Fernando Cavenaghi was signed from River Plate in the summer. ■ Goalkeeper **Boy Waterman** is seen as extremely capable. ■ Constantinos Charalambidis is a seven-times Cypriot league winner.
After finishing fourth in the Greek league last season Asteras qualified by winning the end-of-season European play-off. They finished third in their Europa League group last season.	Given the number of Argentinians in the team, it's not surprising Asteras place a premium on imaginative ball-play and combativity. Usually set up in a 4-2-3-1 with attacking full-backs.	■ Much will be expected of tricky Argentinian number 10 Martin Rolle, particularly as they may lack firepower after selling top scorer Jeronimo Barrales. ■ Skilful winger **Pablo Mazza**. ■ Experienced ex-Romania international centre-back Dorin Goian.
Last season, under Valverde, Bilbao finished seventh in the Spanish Liga. This term they beat Inter Baku of Azerbaijan and Slovakia's Zilina in the qualifying rounds.	After the attack-minded approach of former boss Marcelo Bielsa, the emphasis now is on the midfield getting forward to support a lone striker, who is usually Aritz Aduriz.	■ Striker **Aritz Aduriz** scored 26 goals in 47 games last term in all competitions. ■ Midfielder Raul Garcia was signed from Atletico Madrid this summer. ■ Club captain and centre-back Carlos Gurpegui can also be deployed as a holding midfielder if required.
The Bavarian club finished fifth in the Bundesliga last season – and ahead of heavyweights Schalke and Borussia Dortmund – to qualify directly for the group stage.	Coach Markus Weinzierl's well-drilled and finely-tuned 4-1-4-1 template is all about lightning quick counter-attacks, immediately going for the jugular on winning back the ball.	■ Dutch right-back and inspirational captain **Paul Verhaegh**. ■ Dynamic left-winger Tobias Werner is Augsburg's longest serving player, having joined the club in 2008. ■ Unsung holding midfielder Daniel Baier performs the work of two men.
AZ finished in third place in last season's Eredivisie. In the Europa League qualifying rounds they beat Istanbul Basaksehir of Turkey and Romania's Astra Giurgiu to qualify for the group stage.	The coach likes to switch his formation from game to game – from 4-1-4-1 to 4-2-3-1 to 4-3-3 – but the wide men, prompted by Markus Henriksen, are crucial to the gameplan.	■ Norwegian midfielder **Markus Henriksen** is the central brains of the attack. ■ Ben Rienstra is a clever midfielder with a habit for scoring beautiful goals. ■ Striker Vincent Janssen was discarded as a youth by Feyenoord but is back in the top flight after signing from Almere City.
Swiss league champions for the past six seasons, Basle surprisingly lost on away goals to Maccabi Tel Aviv of Israel in the Champions League play-off round.	Basle play a standard 4-2-3-1 formation and are likely to prioritise the Europa League campaign over dometic matters as St Jakob Park will host this season's Final.	■ Teenage Breel Embolo can play on the right of midfield or as a centre-forward. ■ Argentinian attacking midfielder **Matias Delgado**. ■ Swiss-born Albania midfielder Shkelzen Gashi has been the Swiss league's top scorer for the past two season.

EUROPA LEAGUE 2015-16

OVERVIEW | HONOURS | COACH

BELENENSES

PORTUGAL — GROUP I

One of Portugal's oldest teams are back in Europe for the first time since 2007. They play at **Estadio do Restelo** (19,500) and have plans for a squad of entirely Portuguese players.

Ricardo Sa Pinto, the former Portugal international and Sporting Lisbon boss, is known for his fiery temper.

BESIKTAS

TURKEY — GROUP H

Istanbul's "Black Eagles" are preparing to move to a new stadium, but until the arena is built they are playing home matches at the **Ataturk Olympic Stadium** (76,000).

Senol Gunes is the former national coach who masterminded Turkey's 2002 World Cup campaign.

BORDEAUX

FRANCE — GROUP B

Les Girondins have moved into the **Nouveau Stade** (43,000) which will host matches at Euro 2016. The club are taking part in the Europa League group stage for a third year running.

Former France international **Willy Sagnol** has thrived at Bordeaux in what is his first coaching position.

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

GERMANY — GROUP C

For the past four seasons, fans at **Signal Iduna Park** (65,000) have enjoyed Champions League football. But the 2013 Champions League finalists begin a new era without Jurgen Klopp.

Former Mainz coach **Thomas Tuchel** took over from the inspirational Klopp this summer after a short spell out of the game.

BRAGA

PORTUGAL — GROUP F

The team whose **Estadio Municipal** (30,000) is carved into the side of a quarry, were in the Champions League group stage in 2010 and 2013 and were Europa League runners-up in 2011.

Paulo Fonseca is steadily rebuilding his reputation after a difficult spell in charge of Porto.

CELTIC

SCOTLAND — GROUP A

The dominant force in Scottish football, the last four domestic championships have ended up at **Celtic Park** (60,400), but the club have struggled to make an impact in Europe.

Ronny Deila won the 2013 Norwegian title with Stromsgodset before joining Celtic in June 2014.

CLUB BRUGGE

BELGIUM — GROUP D

Have competed in the Europa League for the past 10 seasons, dropping down from the Champions League in 2006 and 2013. Their **Jan Breydel Stadium** (29,000) is shared with Cercle Brugge.

Former Belgium national-team keeper **Michel Preud'homme** has been in charge since 2013.

DINAMO MINSK

BELARUS — GROUP E

Traditionally the most successful Belarusian club in the Supreme Soviet League, Dinamo have been eclipsed by BATE in recent years. They play at the **Traktor Stadium** (16,500) in Minsk.

42-year-old Serbian **Vuk Rasovic** was appointed in May 2015 after previous experience with Partizan Belgrade.

LEAGUE WINS | CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Belenenses finished sixth in the Portuguese league last season. They beat IFK of Sweden and Austria's Rheindorf Altach in the Europa League qualifying rounds.	Sa Pinto steered Sporting to the 2012 Europa League semi-finals and is not afraid to change formation from match to match, selecting 4-2-3-1, 4-3-3 or 4-1-4-1 depending on the opposition.	■ Versatile midfielder Miguel Rosa regularly chips in with goals from a wide position. ■ Veteran **Carlos Martins** is a former Benfica midfielder. ■ Much-travelled striker Luis Leal is on loan from APOEL of Cyprus.
They finished third in last season's Turkish league – an impressive feat for coach Slaven Bilic given they were playing away from home – and went straight into the Europa League group stage.	Gunes likes his teams to play a high-tempo attacking brand of football – a philosophy that brought a deluge of goals while he was in charge at Bursaspor last season.	■ Veteran German striker Mario Gomez is on loan from Fiorentina. ■ Ricardo Quaresma has returned to the club following a spell playing in the UAE and Portugal. ■ Right-winger **Gokhan Tore** is a Turkish international who was born in Germany.
Bordeaux defied expectations to finish sixth in Ligue 1 last season. They beat Cypriot side AEK Larnaca and Kazakhstan's Kairat Almaty in the Europa League qualifying rounds.	Sagnol prefers a 4-3-1-2 with a tight defensive unit which can quickly spring from defence to attack. With the loss of Mariano to Sevilla, Sagnol is likely to rely on youth this season.	■ Midfielder Henri Saivet is the team's free-kick specialist. ■ Uruguayan Diego Rolan plays a crucial role in the team's speedy counter-attacking game. ■ Physically imposing striker **Cheikh Diabate** is back from injury.
Dortmund finished seventh in the Bundesliga after a curious season which saw their form recover after a disastrous start. They beat Wolfsberger of Austria and Norway's Odd in qualifying,	Under Tuchel, Dortmund continue to play a hard-pressing 4-3-3 with pace out wide in attack. Defensive midfield anchor Julian Weigl has been a revelation this season.	■ Captain and centre-back Mats Hummels. ■ Livewire Germany attacker **Marco Reus** gives pace on the flank. ■ Gabon striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is the team's attacking focal point.
Braga finished fourth in the Portuguese league – behind Benfica, Porto and Sporting – last season and so qualified directly for the group stage of the Europa League.	Paulo Fonseca did well at Pacos de Ferreira last season, taking the side to eighth in the league with a 4-4-2 system. He has introduced the same formation at Braga.	■ Montenegrin midfielder Nikola Vukcevic was signed from Buducnost – where his namesake still plays. ■ Winger Pedro Santos. ■ Attacking midfielder **Rafa Silva** was a member of Portugal's 2014 World Cup squad.
The Scottish champions gave up a two-goal lead in a feisty Champions League play-off game against Swedish champions Malmo and dropped into the Europa League group stage.	Deila earned praise for his methods at Stromsgodset but has been criticised for lacking an alternative to his preferred 4-2-3-1 formation and for his failure to kill off the tie when leading Malmo.	■ Dedryck Boyata is crucial in defence following the sale of Virgil Van Dijk to Southampton. ■ **Scott Brown**, captain and midfield organiser. ■ Attacking midfielder Kris Commons was born in England but capped by Scotland.
Brugge were runners-up to Gent in last season's Belgian championship, despite finishing the regular season in first place. They lost the Champions League play-off to Manchester United.	Brugge began the new season playing an attacking 4-3-3 in the Belgian league. But they are likely to field a more conservative 4-5-1 or 4-2-3-1 against tougher opponents in Europe.	■ Veteran midfielder Timmy Simons is still a hugely influential figure in the side – even at the age of 38. ■ Midfielder **Victor Vazquez** is a Barcelona academy graduate. ■ Right-back Thomas Meunier began his career as a winger.
Finished second to BATE in the 2014 Belarusian league. They pulled off a shock win over Red Bull Salzburg in the Europa League play-off after earlier victories over Zurich and Bulgaria's Cherno More.	Dinamo play a traditional 4-4-2 formation but keep things tight, with special emphasis on a strong defensive line and midfield discipline rather than attacking flair.	■ Montenegro forward **Fatos Beciraj** (*left, in blue*) was signed from Chinese side Changchun Yatai earlier this year. ■ Serbian midfielder Nenad Adamovic is a former Serbia under-19 international. ■ Goalkeeper Alexandr Gutor is a former BATE trainee.

EUROPA LEAGUE 2015-16

	OVERVIEW	HONOURS	COACH
DNIPRO — UKRAINE — GROUP G	Last season's Europa League runners-up play their games at Kiev's **Olympic Stadium** (70,050) because of the security situation in their home of Dnipropetrovsk in eastern Ukraine.	2 / 1	**Miron Markevich** is vastly experienced but has yet to win a trophy either at home or abroad.
FENERBAHCE — TURKEY — GROUP A	European football is back at the **Sukru Saracoglu Stadium** (53,000) in Istanbul following the end of the club's two-year UEFA ban for involvement in match-fixing.	19 / 16	Former Porto boss **Vitor Pereira** took over this summer after leaving Greek champions Olympiakos.
FIORENTINA — ITALY — GROUP I	The club from Florence's **Artemio Franchi Stadium** (47,000) reached the semi-final of last season's Europa League and have made several personnel changes this summer.	2 / 6	Former Juventus midfielder **Paulo Sousa** won the Swiss League last season as coach of Basle.
GRONINGEN — HOLLAND — GROUP F	The team from the **Euroborg Stadium** (22,000) are in the Europa League group stage for the first time although they enjoyed European football in the 1980s.	0 / 1	In charge since 2013, **Erwin Van de Looi** qualified for Europe in his first season and won the Dutch Cup in his second.
KRASNODAR — RUSSIA — GROUP E	The club from south-west Russia have made giant strides in recent years. They have played at their local rivals' **Kuban Stadium** (31,600) while building a new 36,000-capacity venue.	0 / 0	Sharp-suited 49-year-old Belarusian boss **Oleg Kononov** has been in charge of the club since 2013.
LAZIO — ITALY — GROUP G	Lazio have recently been in the shadow of neighbours Roma at Rome's **Stadio Olimpico** (73,000). But the Biancoceleste exceeded all expectations last season to finish third in Serie A.	2 / 6	Former Bologna boss **Stefano Pioli** worked wonders last season after taking charge in June 2014.
LECH POZNAN — POLAND — GROUP I	Last season Lech brought the Polish title to the **INEA Stadion** (43,000) for the first time since 2010. They have been regular qualifiers for Europe but rarely get beyond the opening round.	6 / 5	**Maciej Skorza** won the Polish league title in his first season at Lech. Was previously in charge of Ettifaq in Saudi Arabia.
LEGIA WARSAW — POLAND — GROUP D	Poland's most famous club play at the **Polish Army Stadium** (31,000). They were disqualified from last season's Champions League for fielding an ineligible player against Celtic.	10 / 16	Norwegian **Henning Berg** was a surprise choice to take charge of Legia when appointed in January 2014.

LEAGUE WINS / CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Dnipro finished third in last season's Ukrainian league. However, they surprised everyone by reaching the Europa League Final with victories over Ajax, Club Brugge and Napoli.	Dnipro reached last year's Europa League Final playing a highly-organised, defensive 4-5-1 where the team's pace and rhythm are dictated by a group of mobile midfielders.	■ Goalkeeper Denis Boyko is a Dynamo Kiev trainee who was magnificent in last season's Europa League. ■ Superb 33-year-old midfield orchestrator and free-kick specialist **Ruslan Rotan**. ■ Brazilian wing wizard Matheus.
Second in last season's Turkish league, Fener lost to Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League qualifiers but beat Atromitos of Greece in the Europa League qualifying play-off.	Pereira played 4-2-3-1 for most of last season but has begun this campaign with a 4-4-2, which has allowed him to play both new signings Robin Van Persie and Fernandao.	■ Dutch centre-forward **Robin Van Persie** was signed from Manchester United this summer. ■ Defensive midfielder Mehmet Topal. ■ Portuguese midfielder Raul Meireles. ■ Brazilian striker, Fernandao, last season's Turkish league top scorer for Bursaspor.
Finished fourth in Serie A last season to qualify directly for the Europa League group stage. Coach Vincenzo Montella was sacked after a breakdown in relations with players and directors.	Sousa knows Italian football from his time as a player and can adapt his formation to suit the opposition. He faces a challenge to rehabilitate striker Giuseppe Rossi after several serious knee injuries.	■ Spanish midfielder Mario Suarez was signed from Atletico Madrid. ■ Nikola Kalinic's goals propelled Dnipro to last season's Europa League Final. ■ Wide man **Federico Bernardeschi**. ■ Spanish midfielder Borja Valero was a key figure under Montella.
Groningen won the Dutch Cup for the first time in their history, beating PEC Zwolle in the Final. The victory qualified them directly for the Europa League group stage.	Van de Looi has been criticised for his safety-first approach, but the departure of key players Eric Botteghin (Feyenoord) and Tjaronn Chery (QPR) means they will stick to a 4-5-1 system.	■ Midfielder Simon Tibbling was a Euro under-21 champion with Sweden. ■ Former Manchester City protege **Albert Rusnak**, midfielder and two-goal hero of last season's Cup Final. ■ Striker Michael de Leeuw, often used as a super sub, scored 17 goals last season.
Krasnodar finished third in last season's Russian league to qualify for a second successive Europa League campaign. They beat Slovan Bratislava and HJK of Finland in the qualifying rounds.	Kononov has built a slick, solid and well-balanced outfit. A little mechanical perhaps, but collectively it does the trick. The team's moves go through midfielder Odil Ahmedov.	■ Uzbek international Odil Ahmedov is a ball-winning, box-to-box midfielder. ■ Deep-lying playmaker Pavel Mamayev was signed from CSKA Moscow in 2013. ■ **Mauricio Pereyra** (*left, in green*) is a Uruguayan attacking midfielder who was the club's top scorer last season.
Lazio were handed a tough draw in the Champions League play-off, where they lost over two legs to Bayer Leverkusen of Germany and subsequently dropped into the Europa League.	There were few new additions to the squad over the summer, so the same forward three of Antonio Candreva, Miroslav Klose and Felipe Anderson will feature in a 4-3-3 formation.	■ Argentina midfielder **Lucas Biglia** has been handed the captaincy for the 2015-16 campaign. ■ Brazilian attacker Felipe Anderson was a revelation last season. ■ Veteran Germany striker Miroslav Klose. ■ Wide attacker Antonio Candreva.
Lech were Polish champions after pipping Legia to the title. They beat Sarajevo in the second Champions League qualifying round but lost to Basle and dropped into the Europa League.	Skorza's preferred system is 4-2-3-1. If Lech are chasing a game, he often sends a tall central defender up front as well as pushing midfielder Kasper Hamalainen further forward.	■ Defensive midfielder and captain Lukasz Tralka is experienced and uncompromising. ■ Speedy skilful winger **Szymon Pawlowski** (*left, in white*) likes to run with the ball from deep. ■ Finnish creative midfielder Kasper Hamalainen.
Berg's tactical abilities were heavily criticised after Legia failed to defend their Polish League title last season. But they successfully negotiated three qualifying rounds of the Europa League this term.	Berg was described as a "tactical maniac" after losing last season's league title race. The basic system is 4-2-3-1, but he also used 4-4-2 and likes an organised defence.	■ Captain and versatile defender Jakub Rzezniczak is an aerial threat at set-pieces. ■ Young Slovakian playmaker **Ondrej Duda** is the team's main creative force. ■ Hungarian-Serb striker Nemanja Nikolic boosted the team's firepower when he joined this summer.

EUROPA LEAGUE 2015-16

	OVERVIEW	HONOURS	COACH
LIVERPOOL — ENGLAND — GROUP B	It's all change at **Anfield** after the departure of Steven Gerrard (Los Angeles Galaxy) and sale of Raheem Sterling (Manchester City), so domestic ambitions will prevail this season.	18 / 7	**Brendan Rodgers** is now in his fourth season with the Reds and is under pressure to deliver success.
LOKOMOTIV MOSCOW — RUSSIA — GROUP H	Known as the Railwaymen thanks to their past links with the Soviet railway network, they are in the group stage for the third time. They play at **Lokomotiv Stadium** (28,800).	2 / 8	**Igor Cherevchenko** was confirmed as head coach this summer after stepping in on an interim basis last season.
MARSEILLE — FRANCE — GROUP F	OM endured a chaotic start to the season at the **Stade Velodrome** (67,300) A firesale of players over the summer prompted the resignation of Argentinian coach Marcelo Bielsa.	9 / 10	Former Real Madrid midfielder **Michel** was the surprise choice to replace Bielsa, who quit after one game this season.
MIDTJYLLAND — DENMARK — GROUP D	The team from the **MCH Arena** (11,800) in western Jutland stunned Danish football by winning the league title for the first time last year thanks to their "Moneyball" approach.	1 / 0	**Jess Thorup** was previously coach of Denmark's under-21 side and has been tipped to take charge of the senior side.
MOLDE — NORWAY — GROUP A	The team from the **Aker Stadion** (11,800) won their third Norwegian league title in four seasons and achieved a record points total last year. They also won the Norwegian Cup.	3 / 4	Slovenian **Darko Milanic** had a chaotic spell in charge of English second-tier side Leeds United for 32 days last year.
MONACO — FRANCE — GROUP J	Investment from Russian billionaire owner Dmitry Rybolovlev has now dried up at the **Stade Louis II** (18,500) where the focus has switched to developing and selling on young talent.	7 / 5	Portuguese boss **Leonardo Jardim** steered Monaco to third place in the French league in his first season in charge.
NAPOLI — ITALY — GROUP D	It's been all change at the **Stadio San Paolo** (60,200) this summer, with the departure of Rafa Benitez, who left Italy to return to Spain and take charge of Real Madrid.	2 / 5	Naples-born **Maurizio Sarri** joined the club during the summer after an impressive season at Empoli.
PAOK — GREECE — GROUP C	PAOK owner Ivan Savvidis has grandiose plans for the Thessaloniki club and made a splash recently when bringing Dimitar Berbatov to the **Toumba Stadium** (28,700).	2 / 4	Former Croatia international **Igor Tudor** was appointed this summer after a spell coaching Hajduk Split.

LEAGUE WINS / CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Sixth place in the Premier League last season was a big disappointment after they finished second in 2013-14, when Luis Suarez's goals masked some serious defensive weaknesses.	In a 4-3-3, Christian Benteke will be the main striker, with wide attackers either side, and Jordan Henderson in the central midfield role. They can also switch to a back three.	■ Belgian striker **Christian Benteke** was the major summer signing, at £32.5m from Aston Villa. ■ Brazilian Philippe Coutinho revels in the space behind the centre-forward. ■ Jordan Henderson has replaced Steven Gerrard as captain.
Lokomotiv won the Russian Cup for an eighth time to qualify directly for the group stages. The cup victory rescued a poor season in which Lokomotiv finished eighth in the league.	While Lokomotiv were known for their defensive miserliness last season in a 4-2-3-1 formation. They now have more belief and a willingness to take risks away from home.	■ Captain and Croatia international defender Vedran Corluka was Lokomotiv's player of the season for 2014-15. ■ Midfield grafter Dmitri Tarasov. ■ Senegalese forward **Baye Oumar Niasse** is a lively, unpredictable lone front runner.
After a bright start to the league campaign, Marseille tailed off and finished fourth in Ligue 1 last season but they qualified directly for the group stage of the Europa League.	Michel has reshaped the side into a more conservative 4-2-3-1 following the departures of Giannelli Imbula, Dimitri Payet, Andre Ayew, Florian Thauvin and Andre-Pierre Gignac.	■ Goalkeeper and captain Steve Mandanda. ■ Brazilian midfielder Lucas Silva is on loan from Real Madrid. ■ Argentinian winger **Lucas Ocampos** signed from Monaco after a loan spell last season.
As Danish champions, Midtjylland qualified for the Champions League but lost to APOEL of Cyprus in the second qualifying round. They beat Southampton in the Europa League play-off.	Thorup has continued with the 4-1-4-1 formation favoured by his predecessor, Glen Riddersholm, that saw the club win the Danish championship for the first time in their history.	■ Explosive wide attacker **Pione Sisto**, was born in Uganda but is now a Danish international, and was last term's player of the season. ■ Morten Rasmussen plays the lone striker role. ■ Experienced midfielder Jakob Poulsen.
Molde entered this season's Champions League qualifying rounds but lost on away goals to Dinamo Zagreb. They then beat Standard Liege of Belgium in the Europa League play-off.	Milanic tends to be ultra-cautious, devoted to a no-frills 4-4-2 based on defensive rigour, total commitment from every individual and lots of long balls.	■ Adventurous left-back **Per-Egil Flo** (*left, in white*). ■ Mohammed Elyounoussi is a Moroccan-born, Norwegian international left-winger with a keen eye for goal. ■ Winger/striker Ola Kamara is on loan from Austria Vienna.
Monaco lost 4-3 on aggregate to a strong Valencia side in the Champions League play-off round and therefore dropped into the Europa League group stage.	Monaco sold many of their big-name players this summer and there is a strong Portuguese element to their replacements. A 4-1-4-1 formation remains the template.	■ Portugal midfield schemer Joao Moutinho, whose future at the club is uncertain. ■ Midfield lynchpin **Jeremy Toulalan**. ■ Elegant young midfielder Adama Traore is expected to fill the role of Charles Kondogbia.
Napoli lost to Lazio in what was basically a Champions League decider on the final day of the Serie A season to finish fifth in Serie A and qualify directly for the Europa League group stage.	Sarri has switched the set-up from last season's 4-2-3-1 formation to a 4-3-1-2, with Jose Callejon playing in behind the two forwards, Gonzalo Higuain and Lorenzo Insigne.	■ Argentina striker **Gonzalo Higuain** has stayed in Naples this season despite interest from a number of other clubs. ■ Captain Marek Hamsik plays a deeper midfield role under new boss Sarri. ■ Midfielder Mirko Valdefiori followed Sarri from Empoli.
After finishing fifth last season, PAOK beat Croatia's Lokomotiva Zagreb, Slovakia's Spartak Trnava and Brondby of Denmark in the Europa League qualifying rounds.	Tudor had a long spell at Juventus as a player and has a typically Italian obsession for tactical discipline. He is a big fan of the 3-5-2 system Antonio Conte rolled out to wonderful effect at Juve.	■ Evergreen Bulgarian front-man **Dimitar Berbatov**, now 34, joined this summer after leaving Monaco. ■ Goalscoring Slovak left-winger Robert Mak, previously with Manchester City and Nuremberg, has been PAOK's most in-form player this term.

EUROPA LEAGUE 2015-16

	OVERVIEW	HONOURS	COACH
PARTIZAN BELGRADE SERBIA GROUP L	Partizan won the Serbian league title comfortably again last season, their seventh since 2008. The emphasis is developing young talent at the **Partizan Stadium** (32,700).	26 / 12	**Zoran Milinkovic** replaced the sacked Marko Nikolic at the end of last season, taking charge in March.
QABALA AZERBAIJAN GROUP C	Qabala will be competing in the group stage for the first time after a remarkable series of victories this summer. They play European matches at the **Bakcell Arena** (15,000) in Baku.	3 / 4	Ukrainian **Roman Hryhorchuk** took charge in December 2014, having previously been with Chornomorets.
QARABAG AZERBAIJAN GROUP J	The team from Agdam are based in the capital Baku at the **Tofiq Bahramov Stadium** (31,200) because of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. This is their second time in the group stage.	2 / 3	**Gurban Gurbanov** is Azerbaijan's all-time leading international goalscorer and has been in charge since 2008.
RAPID VIENNA AUSTRIA GROUP E	Rapid have competed in the group stage in five of the past seven seasons. Their **Ernst Happel Stadium** (50,800) has hosted six European club finals and the 2008 Euro Final.	32 / 14	**Zoran Barisic** is a former Rapid player and assistant coach who stepped up to the top job in 2011.
ROSENBORG NORWAY GROUP G	Trondheim's **Lerkendal Stadion** (21,000) regularly hosted Champions League football in the 1990s and early 2000s but Rosenborg have lost their position as Norway's leading club.	22 / 9	**Kare Ingebrigtsen**, who is a former Rosenborg player, has been in charge since July last year.
RUBIN KAZAN RUSSIA GROUP B	Rubin are based in Kazan, 800km west of Moscow. The **Kazan Arena** (45,000) will host games at the 2018 World Cup. They won the Russian league title in 2009 but have since slipped back.	2 / 1	**Rinat Bilyaletdinov**, who took charge in 2014, is the father of ex-Everton player Diniyar.
SAINT-ETIENNE FRANCE GROUP G	Saint-Etienne are one of the great names of French football but they lack the finances to compete with PSG. The **Stade Geoffroy-Guichard** (42,000) will be a venue for Euro 2016.	10 / 6	**Christophe Galtier** is currently Ligue 1's longest-serving boss, having been in charge since 2009.
SCHALKE GERMANY GROUP K	Schalke regularly sell out the **Veltins-Arena** (54,000) in Gelsenkirchen but the club has struggled of late and lost starlet Julian Draxler to Wolfsburg over the summer.	7 / 5	**Andre Breitenreiter** joined this summer after experiencing promotion and relegation with Paderborn.

LEAGUE WINS / CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
Partizan entered the Champions League qualifying round, where they beat Dila Glori of Georgia and Romania's Steaua Bucharest but lost on away goals to BATE in the play-off.	Whether using a 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3 formation, the credo of Milinkovic, who is a widely travelled coach, is to keep the tempo high and play attractive, fluid attacking football.	■ Winger **Andrija Zivkovic** is Partizan's youngest-ever skipper. ■ Striker Ivan Saponjic, like Zivkovic, was a member of Serbia's successful Under-20 World Cup side. ■ Much-travelled Bulgarian frontrunner Valeri Bojinov joined this summer.
Qabala enjoyed a stunning run in the Europa League qualifiers, beating Dinamo Tbilisi of Georgia, Serbia's Cukaricki, Apollon of Cyprus and Greek side Panathinaikos.	Qabala are an athletic, powerful side who prefer to play on the counter-attack. Hryhorchuk's tactics have attracted criticism but helped Qabala to second place in the league last season.	■ Captain and midfielder Cavid Huseynov's goal celebration against Apollon was criticised by journalist Rasim Aliyev, who later died from injuries sustained in an attack by, allegedly, Huseynov's cousin. ■ Brazilian striker **Dodo**. ■ International defender Arif Dasdamirov.
Qarabag entered the Champions League qualifying round and beat Rudar Pljevlja of Montenegro but lost to Celtic. They beat Swiss side Young Boys in the Europa League play-off.	Qarabag like to play a short-passing, possession-based game, with heavy pressing when the opposition have the ball. They have been dubbed the "Caucasian Barcelona".	■ Brazilian striker **Reynaldo** was the league's top scorer in 2013-14. ■ Captain and defender Rashad Sadygo is closing in on 100 caps for the Azerbaijan national side. ■ Midfielder Richard Almeida scored a fine goal against Young Boys in the play-off.
As runners-up in the Austrian league, Rapid entered the qualifying round of the Champions League, where they pulled off a surprise defeat of Ajax before losing to Shakhtar Donetsk.	Goals could be a problem after losing last season's top scorer Robert Beric to Saint-Etienne this summer. Goals from midfield will be crucial in Barisic's preferred 4-2-3-1 set-up.	■ Midfielder and club captain **Steffen Hofmann**. ■ Louis Schaub is an under-21 attacking midfielder who scored two crucial goals in the win over over Ajax. ■ Matej Jelic is a Serbian striker who was signed from Zilina this summer.
After finishing second in the 2014 Norwegian league, Rosenborg beat Vikingur of Faroe Islands, Iceland's KR and Hungarian club Debrecen in the Europa League qualifying rounds.	Ingebrigtsen was a busy midfielder in Rosenborg's European glory years in the 1990s and like his old boss, Nils Arne Eggen, believes in the same aggressive and physically-dominant 4-3-3.	■ Ever-impressive flame-haired keeper Andre Hansen. ■ Tore Reginiussen is a tower-of-strength centre-back, emotional leader and club captain. ■ **Mike Jensen** is the driving force in central midfield.
Replacements for Dynamo Moscow, who were banned for breaching Financial Fairplay regulations, they beat Austria's Sturm Graz and Rabotnicki of Macedonia to reach the group stage.	The pace of their approach play has increased as a result of a preference for young, thrusting players. Dangerous on the counter-attack, but can lack concentration late in games.	■ Carlos Eduardo is experiencing a mini renaissance after several wasted years. ■ Exciting left-back or left-sided midfielder, Elmir Nabiullin. ■ Deep-sitting central midfielder **Magomed Ozdoev** (*left, in green*) has a flair for spectacular goals.
"*Les Verts*" finished fifth in Ligue 1 last season, behind Marseille on goal difference. They beat Romania's Targu Mures and Milsami of Moldova in the Europa League qualifiers.	Had the second best defensive record in France last season playing 4-2-3-1. With Max Gradel sold to Bournemouth and Mevlut Erdinc to Hanover, a lack of firepower is a worry.	■ Winger **Romain Hamouma** is a crucial attacking weapon. ■ Defensive lynchpin Loic Perrin. ■ Defender Florentin Pogba is the brother of Juventus midfielder Paul. ■ Striker Nolan Roux was signed from Lille this summer.
Finished sixth in the Bundesliga last season. Direct qualification for the Europa League group stage was no consolation for missing out on the Champions League.	Schalke hope Breitenreiter will bring back adventurous football after the cautious approach of Roberto Di Matteo. Early signs suggest a second striker alongside Klaas-Jan Huntelaar.	■ Holland striker **Klaas-Jan Huntelaar** is captain and now a veteran but still a vital source of goals ■ Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg is on loan from Bayern Munich and a possible replacement for Julian Draxler ■ Central midfielder Johannes Geis.

EUROPA LEAGUE 2015-16

	OVERVIEW	HONOURS	COACH
SION — SWITZERLAND — GROUP B	This is the first time Sion have played in Europe since taking UEFA to court after being kicked out of the Europa League in 2011. They play at the **Stade Tourbillon** (15,000).	2 / 13	President Christian Constantin has a reputation for sacking coaches and **Didier Tholot** is in his third spell in charge.
SKENDERBEU — ALBANIA — GROUP H	The club from Korce are now established as the dominant team in Albania, having won their fifth successive league title last season. They play at the **Skenderbeu Stadium** (5,700).	6 / 0	**Mirel Josa**'s side have become the first Albanian team to reach the group stage of a UEFA competition.
SLOVAN LIBEREC — CZECH REPUBLIC — GROUP F	The team from the northern Czech city of Liberec, who play their home games at the **Stadion u Nisy** (9,900), have slipped out of contention since winning the Czech League in 2012.	3 / 1	**Jindrich Trpisovsky** was poached from debt-ridden Viktoria Zizkov over the summer for his first top-flight job.
SPARTA PRAGUE — CZECH REPUBLIC — GROUP K	Sparta are the richest club side in the Czech Republic and historically the country's most successful. However, last season witnessed a rare trophyless campaign at the **Letna** (19,400).	36 / 20	**Zdenek Scasny** is in his second spell in charge, having won two league titles as a player and two as a coach.
SPORTING LISBON — PORTUGAL — GROUP H	One of Portugal's big three clubs, they have recently been in the shadow of Benfica and Porto and the **Estadio Jose Alvalade** (50,000) last celebrated winning the league in 2002.	18 / 16	**Jorge Jesus**, won three championships at Benfica then sensationally switched to Sporting this summer.
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR — ENGLAND — GROUP J	Spurs are established in England's "top six" but are unlikely to challenge for the title. Plans are well advanced to build a new stadium alongside the existing **White Hart Lane** (36,000).	2 / 8	Argentinian **Mauricio Pochettino**, in charge since 2014, is Spurs' 12th manager in as many years.
VIKTORIA PLZEN — CZECH REPUBLIC — GROUP E	The club from the city in western Bohemia famed for Pilsner beer have been Czech champions for three of the past five seasons. They play at the **Doosan Arena** (11,700).	3 / 1	**Karel Krejci** replaced Miroslav Koubek less than a month into the current season, after a run of poor results.
VILLARREAL — SPAIN — GROUP E	The "Yellow Submarine" are back in Europe for the first time since 2011 and after suffering relegation in 2012. **El Madrigal** stadium (24,800) is located in eastern Spain.	0 / 0	**Marcelino** has been in charge since 2013, with his own playing career ending in 1994, aged 28, due to injury.

LEAGUE WINS / CUP WINS

HOW THEY QUALIFIED	TACTICS	KEY PLAYERS
As surprise winners of the Swiss Cup last year, having beaten Basle 3-0 in the Final, Sion qualified directly for the group stage of this season's Europa League.	Sion like to play an aggressive pressing game, with Tholot setting his side up in either a 4-1-4-1 or 4-2-3-1 formation. They are, however, prone to being inconsistent.	■ Senegalese centre forward **Moussa Konate** scored 16 league goals in 27 games last season and scored five in his first seven games this season. ■ Hungarian defender and club captain Vilmos Vanczak. ■ International full-back Reto Ziegler.
As Albanian champions, they came through two qualifying rounds, beating Crusaders and Milsami of Moldova before losing to Dinamo Zagreb in the Champions League play-off.	Josa leaves nothing to chance in terms of organisation. With their intense work ethic – and set up either 4-4-2, 4-1-4-1 or 4-4-1-1 – they can be very awkward opponents.	■ Midfield dynamo Bledi Shkembi is club skipper and a huge fan favourite. ■ Hamdi Salihi is a penalty-box predator who returned to Albania after eight years in Austria, the USA, China and Israel. ■ Midfielder **Esquerdinha** joined this summer from Brazilian side Bragantino.
Slovan beat Jablonec on penalties in the 2015 Czech Cup Final. They then beat Hapoel Kiryat Shmona of Israel and Croatia's Hajduk Split in the Europa League qualifying rounds.	Trpisovsky's Liberec side tend to rely on their physical strength and a solid defence. They will adopt a relatively direct approach, typically playing in a 4-2-3-1 formation.	■ Slovak international striker Marek Bakos joined from Viktoria Plzen in January. ■ Free-kick specialist and winger **Josef Sural** (*left, in blue*) is one of Liberec's main sources of goals. ■ Captain David Pavelka is a skilful left-sided midfielder.
Sparta finished second in the league last season and lost to CSKA Moscow in the Champions League qualifying round before beating Thun of Switzerland in the Europa League play-off.	Scasny has apparently abandoned experiments with a 3-5-2 formation and now favours 4-4-2 or 4-5-1, depending on the occasion. The defence remains a cause for concern, however.	■ **David Lafata** was the Czech league's top scorer in four of the last five seasons. ■ Left-sided midfielder Ladislav Krejci is an undisputed star at 23 and an established Czech international. ■ Borek Dockal is a central midfielder who previously played on the right.
Sporting finished third in the Portuguese league last season. In the Champions League play-off they were beaten by CSKA Moscow and dropped into the Europa League.	At Sporting, Jesus is replicating his approach from Benfica, with an attack-minded 4-4-2 where central attacker Islam Slimani is aided by a second forward, Teo Gutierrez.	■ Powerful box-to-box midfielder William Carvalho has long been tipped to move on from Lisbon. ■ Peruvian winger or attacking midfielder Andre Carrillo. ■ Algerian front man **Islam Slimani** has been a crucial source of goals.
Despite Champions League aspirations, Spurs finished fifth in the Premier League last season, without ever troubling the top four, to qualify directly for the Europa League group stage.	Pochettino likes his teams to press from high up in the pitch in a 4-2-3-1 formation. He has been keen to promote youth, notably Harry Kane, Nabil Bentaleb and Ryan Mason.	■ English football's latest golden boy **Harry Kane** is already an invaluable player for his club. ■ French goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris. ■ Danish midfielder Christian Eriksen is the main creative force.
As last season's Czech league champions, Plzen entered the Champions League qualifiers, but lost to Maccabi Tel Aviv and dropped into the Europa League.	The fluid, attacking style adopted by former boss Pavel Vrba, now national coach, remains Plzen's calling card, with goals likely to come from anywhere in their five-man midfield.	■ Left-back **David Limbersky** was once dubbed the "new Nedved". ■ Wide midfielder Jan Kopic joined from Jablonec in the biggest Czech transfer deal of the summer. ■ International midfielder Daniel Kolar lost his wife to cancer last year.
Villarreal finished sixth in La Liga last season – but a huge 16 points behind fifth-place Sevilla – and qualified directly for the group stage of the Europa League.	After losing Giovani Dos Santos to MLS this summer, Marcelino added firepower to aid his preferred 4-4-2 formation in strikers Roberto Soldado (Tottenham) and Cedric Bakumbu (Bursaspor).	■ **Bruno Soriano** is the team's captain and midfield lynchpin. ■ Mexican midfielder Jonathan Dos Santos, younger brother of Giovani. ■ Spain striker Soldado is back in La Liga after a disappointing spell in the Premier League.

September 2007

On the verge of civil war at home, Iraq are shock Asian Cup winners

Steven Gerrard of Liverpool, Real Madrid's Ruud Van Nistelrooy and Carlos Tevez of Manchester United were the prominent players on the front cover of a special edition providing expert analysis on the 144 teams taking part in the Champions League and UEFA Cup.

There was also a Dispatch from Indonesia, where Iraq – in spite of the disturbances of war at home – won the Asian Cup against all the odds, beating Saudi Arabia in the Final.

Michael Church, who was in Jakarta covering the tournament, wrote: "As Iraq captain Younis Mahmoud led his team out for the Final, the black armbands worn by him and his team-mates were a poignant reminder of the terrible violence and suffering in their homeland.

"Four days earlier, more than 50 football fans had been killed in a double car bombing in the Baghdad suburb of Mansour as they celebrated Iraq's semi-final victory."

In a sensitive article that brought home the raw emotion of the occasion, Church said: "The shadow of violence hung over the Iraqis throughout the tournament.

"Physiotherapist Anwar Jassim was the victim of a car bombing as he prepared to join the team at their training camp in Jordan; the brother-in-law of goalkeeper Noor Sabri was killed in the days leading up to the tournament; and the stepmother of midfielder Hawar Mulla Mohammed was killed just before Iraq's quarter-final clash with Vietnam in Bangkok.

"While the nation continues to disintegrate and heads towards seemingly inevitable civil war, the national team have become a rallying point and common cause for the whole country.

"Going into the Asian Cup finals there had been few signs Iraq could go on to become continental champions. Brazilian coach Jorvan Vieira was appointed in May and had spent mere weeks with the team as they started preparations in Jordan."

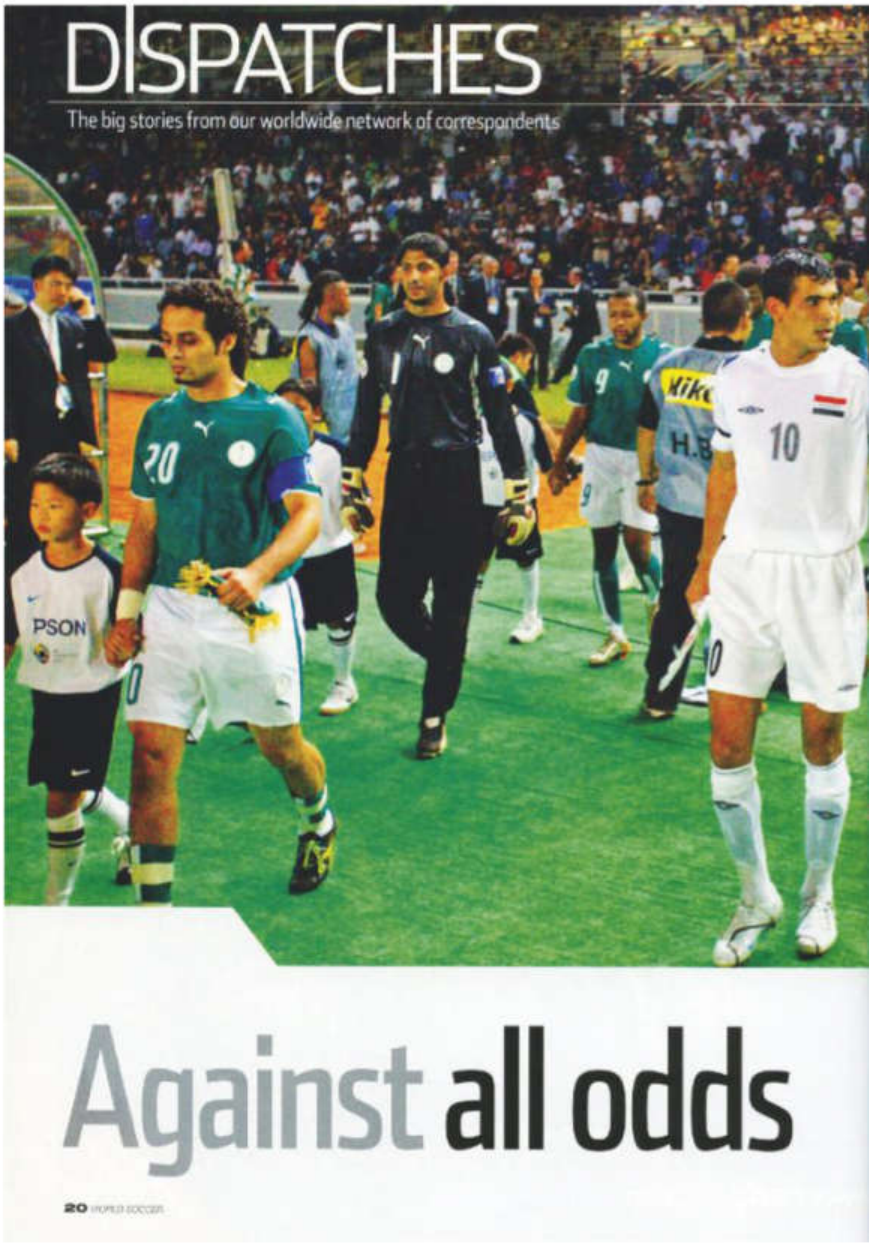
Iraq began the tournament as rank outsiders, but after drawing their first group match with Thailand they beat tournament favourites Australia 3-1, before ensuring their place in the knockout stage with a 0-0 draw against Oman.

Further wins against Vietnam, in the quarter-finals, and South Korea, on penalties in the semi-finals, took the Iraqis, as Church explained, "into uncharted territory: the country's first Asian Cup Final".

Iraq won the Final 1-0 and Church ended his report with the view of the successful captain, Younis Mahmoud, commenting: "After the game, [Mahmoud] said: 'A mother of one of the victims said she had not wept over her child's dead body but had declared: 'I present my son as a sacrifice to the Iraqi national team.'

"So we had to win." WS

Final...Iraq (in white) and Saudi Arabia



> "While the nation continues to disintegrate and heads towards seemingly inevitable civil war, the national team have become a rallying point"

Showing the way... Younis Mahmoud (right), the tournament's most valuable player, leads Iraq out for the Final against Saudi Arabia

INDONESIA DISPATCHES

MICHAEL CHURCH in Jakarta

AS IRAQ CAPTAIN Younis Mahmoud led his team out in Jakarta for the Asian Cup Final and their shock 1-0 defeat of Saudi Arabia, the black armbands worn by him and his team-mates were a poignant reminder of the terrible violence and suffering in their homeland.

Four days earlier, more than 50 football fans had been killed in a double car bombing in the Baghdad suburb of Mansour as they celebrated Iraq's semi-final victory against South Korea.

The shadow of violence hung over the Iraqis throughout the tournament. Team physiotherapist Anwar Jassim was the victim of a car bombing as he prepared to join the team at their training camp in Jordan in June; the brother-in-law of goalkeeper Noor Sabri was killed in the days leading up to the tournament; and the step-mother of midfielder Hawar Mulla Mohammed was killed just before Iraq's quarter-final clash with Vietnam in Bangkok.

As the security situation has steadily worsened in Iraq, football – just as every other facet of life – has been seriously affected.

The nation endured more than a decade of United Nations sanctions following the first Gulf War and the sporting infrastructure was already beyond breaking point before the United States-led invasion of 2003. The subsequent insurgency forced the national team and club sides to play all their international matches overseas, in countries such as Qatar, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates.

Not surprisingly, that has had an adverse affect on the Iraqi players, who struggled to qualify for the Asian Cup, losing against Singapore, while the federation has had to bear the additional costs of the national team's nomadic existence.

"No one helps us [financially]," said federation president Hussain Saeed. "[We have continued] only because of our relationships with other federations. Qatar will host our Olympic qualifying games, and sometimes others will do it. We prepared for the Asian Cup in Amman in Jordan, then went to South Korea for two matches, and this comes from a good relationship with our federation.

"We need some help from the Iraqi government or from FIFA or from the AFC [Asian Football Confederation]. They must take care of us. Also, the political parties in Iraq must support this team because they represent all the people of Iraq. All the people love this team."

> "Iraq's sporting infrastructure was already beyond breaking point before the US-led invasion"

Common cause

While the nation continues to disintegrate and heads towards a seemingly inevitable civil war, the national team have become a rare rallying point and common cause for the whole country.

All enquiries about the team's ethnic make-up were met with a straight bat by federation officials, who sought instead to focus attention on the lessons the team could teach the various factions at home.

"We don't know who is Sunni and who is Shia in our team or among the fans, and we don't care," Saeed said. "The fans love Iraq and I think Iraqis are united under two things, one is the flag and the other is the national football team. This is very important.

"Football is the hope for the people in Iraq, and when you care about football, we can decrease the violence in Iraq. When the football team is playing there is no bombing in Iraq because all the people are going to

Iraq's Asian Cup triumph was amazing given the obstacles that stood in their way

Also in this issue...

p34-35 After a starring role in the Under-20 World Cup, Freddy Adu, who made his MLS debut aged 14, said in a face-to-face interview: "At the Under-20 World Cup I changed a lot of people's minds. You don't just write off people, especially at the age of 18. My career hasn't really started yet."

p8 *World Soccer* editor Gavin Hamilton argued the case for giving the Champions League Final a permanent home, explaining: "The awarding of the hosting rights for the Champions League Final has become a political and commercial decision taken to appease the various different interests within UEFA.

"Something needs to be done. A simple solution would be to play the Final in the same place every year.

"The Stade de France in Paris would be the obvious venue."

p10 Brian Glanville described Jack Warner as "shameless and insatiable as ever" for launching an attack on England's hopes of hosting the 2018 World Cup. "The Teflon Trinidadian," as Glanville described him, "has poked his malign face above the parapet and grotesquely attacked English football.

"He has insisted England must not be awarded the 2018 World Cup, but why this ill-natured man, the survivor of so many contretemps, should choose this moment to make so gratuitous an assault on England and the FA defies logical analysis."

p84-85 Two years after the national side had reached the last eight in their first World Cup finals, a Spotlight on football in Ukraine included an analysis of the 16 clubs, including Simferopol in the Crimea, that made up the country's top flight.

10 years ago

How the mighty are fallen. The Libertadores Cup winners Sao Paulo – who beat fellow Brazilian side Atletico Paranaense in the Final in July – slipped into the relegation zone of the domestic championship after going eight league games without a win.

20 years ago

Former Arsenal manager George Graham was banned from football for a year after being found guilty of receiving payment from agent Rune Hauge following his signing of Norwegian defender Pal Lydersen and Danish midfielder John Jensen.

30 years ago

Reigning European champions France met their South American counterparts Uruguay, as the two major continental champions, in the inaugural Artemio Franchi Trophy. The predecessor of what is now the Confederations Cup was won 2-0 by the French.

40 years ago

Coach Hans Kraay had quit Ajax and all the talk was whether Rinus Michels would return to the club. Michels had led Ajax to their first European Cup win in 1971 before moving on to Barcelona and then Holland's national side, who he took to the 1974 World Cup Final.

50 years ago

Three years after leaving his spiritual home, Hungarian coach Bela Guttmann returned to take charge of Benfica for a second time. During his first spell at the Estadio da Luz he signed the 19-year-old Eusebio and led the club to European Cup glory, in 1961 and 1962.

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Sudamericana Cup...Bolivar (right) and Defensor

AUGUST 6-SEPTEMBER 2, 2015

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Thursday August 6

EUROPA LEAGUE: Rabotnicki of Macedonia produce the shock of the night and win 2-1 in Turkey to knock Trabzonspor out of the Europa League. Romania's Astra beat West Ham and Jablonec of the Czech Republic win 3-2 in Copenhagen to go through on away goals.
FRANCE: Angel Di Maria joins Paris Saint-Germain from Manchester United and becomes French football's second-most expensive signing of all time, with his €63m transfer fee only topped by the €64m PSG paid Napoli for Edinson Cavani in 2013.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund's 5-0 win at home to Austrian side Wolfsberger is watched by 65,190 fans – a record crowd for a Europa League qualifying game.

Friday August 7

ALGERIA: USM Alger beat El Eulma 1-0 and become the first team to qualify for the semi-finals of the CAF Champions League with a fourth win in four group games.
ENGLAND: The day before the Premier League season starts, Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho signs a new four-year deal with the defending champions.
GREECE: Under-21s coach Kostas Tsanas is named interim boss of the senior national side, following the resignation of Uruguayan Sergio Markarian in July.
IVORY COAST: Ibrahim Sory Diomande scores eight minutes from time as Africa Sports beat CO Bouafle 1-0 to win the Ivorian Cup.
PALESTINE: The second leg of the Palestinian Cup Final, between Al Ahly of the West Bank and Shejaia from Gaza, is cancelled after Israel denies entry permits for seven of Shejaia's party, including four players. The permits are required to pass through a border crossing in order to reach the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, where the game was due to take place on Sunday.
UEFA: The draw for the Champions League play-offs sees CSKA Moscow and Sporting Lisbon meet in a repeat of the 2005 UEFA Cup Final. Last season's quarter-finalists Monaco face Valencia, while Manchester United take on Club Brugge. In the Europa League, Ajax meet Czech Republic side Jablonec and Borussia Dortmund play Odd of Norway.

Saturday August 8

FRANCE: Marcelo Bielsa resigns as Marseille coach after they lose their season opener 1-0 at home to Caen. Angers lead the table for the first time in 43 years after their 2-0 win away to Montpellier.
HOLLAND: Defending champions PSV's opening Eredivisie game at Den Haag is one of five postponed due to police strike action.
ITALY: New signing Mario Mandzukic is on target as Juventus beat Lazio 2-0 in the Italian Super Cup. The Croatian striker has also scored in the German and Spanish Super Cups in the previous three seasons.
SENEGAL: Generation Foot beat Casa Sports 4-3 in extra-time to become the first third-tier side to win the Senegalese Cup Final. Promoted to Ligue 2 a few weeks ago, they will now play in next season's CAF Confederation Cup.

Sunday August 9

BRAZIL: Gremio's 5-0 win against local rivals Internacional is their biggest winning margin in the Porto Alegre derby in more than 100 years.
ENGLAND: Arsenal lose 2-0 at home to West Ham United, who include Reece Oxford in their side. At 16 years and 236 days, he is the second-youngest player to start a Premier League game.
GERMANY: Hertha Berlin's team bus is shot at by a motorcyclist in Bielefeld on its way to pick up the players from the local train station ahead of Monday's German Cup tie against Arminia Bielefeld. Hamburg lose 3-2 after extra time to fourth-tier side Carl Zeiss Jena.
PORTUGAL: Jorge Jesus claims his first silverware as Sporting Lisbon coach with a 1-0 victory in the Portuguese Super Cup against Benfica – the club he controversially left in the summer, after six years and three league titles.
SOUTH KOREA: A goalless draw with North Korea sees South Korea end the EAFF East Asian Cup undefeated and win the four-nation regional tournament for a third time, having previously been champions in

Bragging rights...Gremio celebrate their fourth goal in a 5-0 thrashing of local rivals Internacional in the Porto Alegre derby

On top...Angers' Cheikh N'Doye

2003 and 2008. Jang Hyun-soo wins the tournament's Most Valuable Player award.

THAILAND: Despite losing their opening group game to Laos, Thailand beat Myanmar 3-0 in the Final to be crowned AFF Under-16 champions for a third time.

Monday August 10

ENGLAND: Manchester City win 3-0 at West Bromwich Albion to go top of the Premier League after the first round of matches.

GERMANY: Hertha Berlin put Sunday's shooting behind them to win 2-0 at Arminia Bielefeld in the German Cup. Osnabruck's game with RB Leipzig is abandoned in the 71st minute after the referee is hit by a missile thrown from the crowd.

Tuesday August 11

ARGENTINA: River Plate win 3-0 in Japan against Gamba Osaka in the annual game between the J.League Cup champions and the winners ➤

Winner...River Plate's Javier Saviola (right)

UEFA Super Cup

KEIR RADNEDGE

Winner...Pedro clinches victory

Pedro has the final say in Tbilisi

Barcelona win all-Spanish affair in Georgia

At last the European Super Cup has found its purpose in football life – and not merely as a platform for fine players, such as Pedro this time around, to wave a glorious goodbye to one club before embarking on a new career adventure.

Twelve days before scoring on his Premier League debut for Chelsea against West Bromwich Albion, he struck in extra-time to give Barcelona a thrilling 5-4 victory over Sevilla in front of 51,940 fans in Tbilisi – the third venue for the European season curtain-raiser since UEFA took the show on the road.

The initial Super Cup was launched by Ajax in their Champions Cup-commanding days of the early 1970s after the concept had been proposed by the *De Telegraaf* newspaper.

Their preference was to take on Rangers, winners of the 1972 Cup-winners Cup, rather than risk life and limb in the World Club Cup against whichever shoulder-chipped Argentinian or Uruguayan team might emerge from the Libertadores Cup. However, Ajax's success is not included in UEFA's formal records because Rangers were suspended from European competition at the time after their fans had run happy riot after their Cup-winners victory over Dynamo Moscow in Barcelona.

How the game has changed since those days. Rangers have sunk into the nether reaches of the Scottish club game, while Ajax had already been eliminated from the qualifying rounds of this season's Champions League before Barcelona and Sevilla even faced off in Georgia.

The scrapping of the Cup-winners Cup in 1999 meant that subsequently the winners of the UEFA Cup/Europa League have provided the annual challenge to the European champions. And after a number of two-leg false starts, the event has settled down, since 1998, as a single match.

Initially, Monaco provided a convenient venue as UEFA could tie the match in with the Champions League draw. However, the logistical challenges ultimately tested even UEFA's administration, while the clubs objected to playing on a Friday, which confused the start of their own domestic campaigns.

FIFA's scrapping of the August international slot freed up an earlier midweek date so, since 2013, UEFA has been able to take the show around those countries that are unlikely ever to host the Final of the Champions League or European Championship. Prague 2013 was followed by Cardiff 2014 and Tbilisi, with future stops scheduled for Trondheim next year and Skopje in 2017.

The event will certainly continue to keep everyone happy if future finals reproduce even half the drama seen in Tbilisi.

Leading 4-1 in the second half, Barcelona appeared home and dry until three Sevilla goals levelled matters. Cue the arrival of Pedro from the bench and, five minutes from the end of extra-time he scored the goal that saw Barca equal Milan's record of five Super Cup successes. WS

• *For match details, see page 95*

Puerto Rico

BRYAN KAY

Knicks star kicks off new NASL hope

Basketball's Carmelo Anthony helps finance an island team

With Puerto Rico's current economic woes causing some observers to predict a mass exodus from the Caribbean island to the US mainland, the backdrop for establishing a new professional football club looks far from appetising. But try telling that to the quixotic figure of basketball luminary Carmelo Anthony.

The 31-year-old New York Knicks forward was recently announced as the driving force behind the surprise emergence of Puerto Rico FC, who are set to join the North American Soccer League next year.

The new club will hope to fill a gap created by the departure of the Puerto Rico Islanders side from the reinvented NASL scene in a fog of uncertainty in 2013. A catalogue of financial difficulties and poorly attended games proved to be decisive in ending the club's 10-year run as a going concern.

If the Islanders' experience is any kind of barometer, Anthony may have his work cut out. Despite proving themselves to be one of the NASL's most successful outfits, the Islanders struggled to attract the kind of crowds their play merited, with an average attendance of just 1,864 in their final campaign. And this was for a side that finished second in the league's inaugural season, third in 2012 and enjoyed an incredible run to the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Champions League in 2009, prior to the NASL reboot.

Yet Anthony, who is of part Puerto Rican heritage, remains optimistic about the new club, who will be based in Bayamon and play at the same Juan Ramon Loubriel Stadium as the Islanders.

"I am committed to bringing soccer to the next level in Puerto Rico," he said at the new club's unveiling. "To the thousands of fans in Puerto Rico that have been waiting for soccer to come back, I can promise a world-class organisation in a world-class league, with a strong social mission to provide kids the opportunity to participate in this growing sport."

Anthony's Puerto Rico club will be joined in the NASL ranks next year by Miami FC – who have former Italian World Cup winner Paolo Maldini as one of their investors.

The two new clubs are a coup of sorts for the league, although this is no longer the NASL of Pele, George Best and Franz Beckenbauer that ruled the game in the US in the 1970s. Today's NASL is the de facto second division of the United States football pyramid, having come out of the cold in 2011 after ceasing some 27 years before.

With no promotion and relegation, MLS is essentially the only show in town where TV is concerned and it attracts all the top talent. The NASL hierarchy, however, consider themselves purists and crave a truly meritocratic pyramid that awards success and punishes failure. That, of course, means teams going up and down the leagues – an idea that has been resisted so far by MLS and its emerging partner league, the third-tier USL.

There are small victories, though, as Miami FC and Maldini proved by securing a NASL franchise in the face of David Beckham and co's struggle to get a MLS team up and running in the Florida city. The NASL also possesses the most recognisable brand in US soccer in the form of New York Cosmos, with much of the noise the league generates involving Cosmos and their star attraction: former Real Madrid striker Raul.

While the NASL's two new additions should have taken the current 11-team league up to 13 sides, that number will almost certainly drop back to 12

> "I am committed to bringing soccer to the next level in Puerto Rico"
> New York Knicks basketball star Carmelo Anthony

Vision...basketball's Carmelo Anthony

Support...Carmelo Anthony at a kids' soccer school in Bayamon

as Minnesota United prepare to quit NASL for the draw of MLS and top-tier status.

While the NASL bears an admirable philosophy, pragmatism means MLS will likely continue to rule the roost for some time to come – with or without basketball stars stepping into the void. WS

Star...New York Cosmos' Raul

➤ of the Sudamericana Cup.

BULGARIA: Lokomotiv Plovdiv say they will consider quitting the league after they are fined 37,500 levs (£13,000) for fans' racist behaviour during Saturday's 1-1 draw with Litex Lovech.

FIFA: Francois Carrard is appointed independent chairman of the FIFA 2016 Reform Committee.

HOLLAND: Goalkeeper Martin Hansen scores a last-minute equaliser with a back-heeled volley as Den Haag draw 2-2 with PSV in one of the re-arranged Eredivisie games that was cancelled at the weekend due to police strike action.

SPAIN: Despite blowing a 4-1 lead, Barcelona beat Sevilla 5-4 in extra-time to equal Milan's record of five UEFA Super Cups wins.

TURKEY: Fenerbahce midfielder Mehmet Topal's car is shot at as he drives home after training.

Wednesday August 12

ALBANIA: Laci beat Skenderbeu on penalties after drawing 2-2 in the Albanian Super Cup.

BULGARIA: Cherno More win the Bulgarian Super Cup for the first time, beating Ludogorets 1-0.

CANADA: Montreal Impact draw 2-2 with Vancouver Whitecaps in their home leg of the Canadian Championship Final.

Championship Final...Montreal Impact's Johan Venegas (in blue)

CYPRUS: AEL beat APOEL on penalties after a goalless draw to win the Cypriot Super Cup for the first time in 30 years.

MALTA: Last season's champions Hibernians win the first silverware of the new campaign, coming from behind to beat Birkirkara 2-1 in the Maltese Super Cup.

ROMANIA: Ianis Hagi becomes the Romanian top flight's youngest captain, at the age of 16, as he takes the armband for the second half of Viitorul's 2-1 win at Universitatea Craiova. His father, former national skipper Gheorghe Hagi, founded, owns and manages the club.

SAUDI ARABIA: Brazilian midfielder Carlos Eduardo scores on his debut after signing from Porto as Al Hilal beat Al Nassr 1-0 to win the Saudi Super Cup in London.

Thursday August 13

BRAZIL: Kaka is recalled to the national squad for next month's friendlies against the USA and Costa Rica. The 33-year-old Orlando City playmaker becomes the first MLS player to be called up by Brazil.

Friday August 14

GERMANY: Bayern Munich open the new Bundesliga campaign with a 5-0 thrashing of Hamburg. RB Leipzig are awarded a 2-0 win in the German Cup after Monday's game was abandoned when the referee was hit on the head with a lighter thrown by Osnabruck fans.

SPAIN: Aritz Aduriz scores a hat-trick as Athletic Bilbao take a 4-0 first-leg lead in the Spanish Super Cup against Barcelona.

TURKEY: Robin Van Persie makes his league debut from the bench as Fenerbahce begin the new campaign with a 2-0 win over Eskisehirspor.

Saturday August 15

GERMANY: Thomas Tuchel's first Bundesliga game in charge of Borussia Dortmund ends with a 4-0 win over Borussia Monchengladbach, while Ingolstadt celebrate their top-flight debut with a 1-0 victory at Mainz.

ICELAND: Valur become the first team to ensure their qualification for Europe in 2016-17, beating KR 2-0 to claim the Icelandic Cup for the first time in 10 years.

UAE: Nigerian striker Emmanuel Emenike, who is on loan from Turkish side Fenerbahce, scores twice as Al Ain beat Al Nasr 4-2 to win the Arabian Gulf Super Cup.

Sunday August 16

ENGLAND: After just two games, Manchester City move five points ahead of Chelsea in the Premier League with a 3-0 win at home to the defending champions.

FRANCE: A week after coach Marcelo Bielsa walked out, Marseille lose again, going down 1-0 at Reims. Reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain beat newcomers GFC Ajaccio 2-0.

IVORY COAST: Tanda become only the fourth club from outside the capital, Abidjan, to win the Ivorian league, beating Korhogo 2-1 to finish a point ahead of ASEC Mimosas.

MEXICO: Tigres beat Chiapas 4-1 to send defending league champions Santos Laguna, who lost 2-0 at ➤

➤ home to Club America the day before, to the bottom of the league.
PORTUGAL: Benfica kick off their league season with a 4-0 victory over Estoril and extend their unbeaten home run in the competition to 52 games.
UGANDA: Vipers win the season-opening Ugandan Super Cup, beating SC Villa on penalties after a goalless draw.
USA: Losing 3-1 with nine minutes to go, Sporting Kansas City come back and beat Vancouver Whitecaps 4-3.

Monday August 17

ENGLAND: Liverpool's £32.5m summer signing Christian Benteke scores on his home debut as newly promoted Bournemouth are beaten 1-0 at Anfield.
GERMANY: Former DFB president Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder dies at the age of 82.
ITALY: Goals from Keisuke Honda and Luiz Adriano give Sinisa Mihajlovic a winning start as Milan coach with a 2-0 victory over Perugia in the Italian Cup.
NIGERIA: New national coach Sunday Oliseh calls up uncapped Wolverhampton Wanderers goalkeeper Carl Ikeme, midfielder Izunna Ernest Uzochukwu of Amkar Perm and Ufa striker Sylvester Igboun for September's African Nations Cup qualifier in Tanzania.
SPAIN: Athletic Bilbao win their first trophy for 31 years as a 1-1 draw

Silverware...victorious Athletic Bilbao

with Barcelona gives them a 5-1 aggregate victory in the Spanish Super Cup. Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos ends speculation about his future with the club by signing a new five-year deal.

Tuesday August 18

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Sporting Lisbon end CSKA Moscow's nine-game unbeaten run in qualifying games with a 2-1 win in Portugal. Memphis Depay scores twice as ➤

South America

TIM VICKERY

Clouds over Copa America centenary

Scandal, greed and overkill put next June's tournament in the USA in doubt

Will the Centenary Copa America actually go ahead? Scheduled to take place in the USA next June, it has been included in the FIFA calendar but is yet to be confirmed. One obvious problem is the corruption crisis that erupted last May, with the US investigation and the arrest of 14 people – nine FIFA officials and five corporate executives.

While this was originally seen as a FIFA scandal, the scope was localised, with the problems to be found in the interface between Latin American TV companies and the region's football administrators.

The evidence appears to point to a scenario where TV rights were sold for considerably less than the market price as a consequence of bribes to officials. And all this has taken place in the CONCACAF and CONMEBOL regions – whose members will be involved in the Centenary Copa, which proposes to include the 10 South American nations plus six from the north and central Americas plus the Caribbean.

So, with the projected kick-off just nine months away, there is organisational paralysis. And in addition to the legal problems, there is another doubt: does everyone involved really want the competition to go ahead?

It seems clear that CONMEBOL, the South America confederation, wants to push on; it is, after all, their centenary, with 2016 marking 100 years of the Copa America, the world's oldest continental competition.

"We want to do it," CONMEBOL president Juan Angel Napout told a Paraguayan radio station recently. "The 100-year mark is important and has to be celebrated.

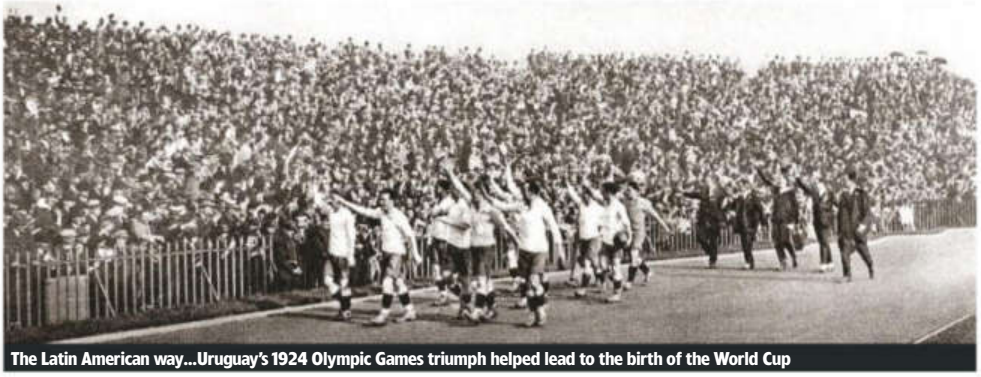
Success... Chile celebrate their first Copa triumph in July

> "The 100 years will be celebrated and it will happen on the pitch"
> CONMEBOL president Juan Angel Napout on the Copa America's centenary

"We've been talking to the CONCACAF people and we're going to keep talking. We want to continue on the lines that we've been following and hold a tournament together with CONCACAF. But we understand the moment that they are going through and we don't want to force anyone to do anything.

"What I can state is that the 100 years will be celebrated and it will happen on the pitch."

Hardly surprisingly, Napout's comments led to a plethora of gossip and unconfirmed reports that the USA wanted nothing to do with the tournament, either in terms of hosting or taking part. Colombia and Ecuador were floated as possible alternative venues,


The Latin American way...Uruguay's 1924 Olympic Games triumph helped lead to the birth of the World Cup

although this was quickly denied by Luis Chiriboga, president of the Ecuadorian FA.

The competition, then, is in serious trouble – which is probably exactly where it deserves to be as there was always something desperately cynical about the plan to stage the tournament in the United States.

The birth of the Copa America, in 1916, is a hugely significant moment in the development of the global game. Held almost annually in the early stages, it was responsible for a rapid rise in playing standards and in interest in the game in the continent's south cone – in Brazil, but especially in Argentina and Uruguay.

A direct line can be drawn between the birth of the Copa and the inaugural World Cup just 14 years later. Boosted by experience gained in the Copa, Uruguay stunned everyone by waltzing their way to the gold medal in the 1924 Olympics in Paris – a feat they repeated four years later in Amsterdam, with Argentina collecting the silver.

Observers were astonished as they had never before seen football played with such an artistic flourish. With the English professionals banned from the Olympics, there had to be a new competition, open to all comers, to find out who really was best – and so the World Cup was born.

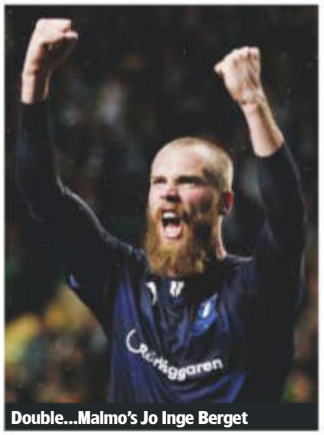
The first Copa America, then, is a profound moment and one of which South America should be proud. Holding a commemorative competition in the USA

Under pressure...CONMEBOL president Juan Angel Napout

smacks of selling out the moment in a spirit of greed.

There is also the problem of overkill. Six South American sides were in action during the World Cup and all of them played in this year's Copa America. Another competition next year would mean that, if selected, some of the world's best players would have a third consecutive year without adequate holidays. And staging the thing in the middle of the most gruelling World Cup qualification campaign on the planet is surely putting too much of a burden on the players.

Peru would certainly seem to think so. Their preliminary plan for the Centenary Copa is to take an under-23 side – and a tournament full of understrength and experimental squads is surely no way to celebrate a centenary. WS


Double...Malmo's Jo Inge Berget

Manchester United win 3-1 at home to Club Brugge.

REP OF IRELAND: Bournemouth midfielder Eunan O'Kane gets a first call-up to the senior squad, for next month's Euro 2016 qualifiers against Gibraltar and Georgia, along with uncapped Alan Judge of Brentford and Aberdeen's Adam Rooney.

Wednesday August 19

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Jo Inge Berget, who was on loan at Celtic last season, scores two vital away goals for Malmo in their 3-2 loss to his former club, while Valencia beat last term's quarter-finalists Monaco 3-1 at home.

MEXICO: Defending champions Club America maintain their 100 per cent record in this year's CONCACAF Champions League with a 1-0 victory over Walter Ferretti of Nicaragua.

SPAIN: La Liga's traditional two-week winter break will be reduced this season in a bid to ease fixture congestion ahead of next year's European Championship. There will now be a full round of fixtures on December 30, with the campaign ending on May 15.

Thursday August 20

EUROPA LEAGUE: Three down midway through the first half, Borussia Dortmund recover to beat Norway's Odd 4-3 in the away leg of their play-off, Athletic Bilbao throw away a two-goal lead to lose 3-2 to Zilina in Slovakia and Midtjylland's Tim Sparv scores against one of his former sides as the Danish side draw 1-1 at Southampton.

ITALY: Catania are relegated from Serie B to the third-tier Lega Pro and given a 12-point deduction for their part in a match-fixing scandal. Lega Pro sides Teramo and Savona are demoted to Serie D for their involvement in the saga.

NAMIBIA: Defending champions Namibia will host the 2016 COSAFA Cup for member nations of the ➤

➤ Council of Southern Africa Football Associations, from May 15 to 29, in the capital, Windhoek.

Friday August 21

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Last year's winners ES Setif go out of this season's competition with a 3-0 defeat at USM Alger, who become the first side to win their first five matches in the group phase. The result means Al Merreikh join USM Alger in the knockout stage.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain win 1-0 at Montpellier to take maximum points from their opening three Ligue 1 games.
OMAN: Fanja win the Super Cup without kicking a ball after Al Arouba fail to turn up for the curtain-raiser to the new season in protest at the Oman Football Association's stance over a payment wrangle.

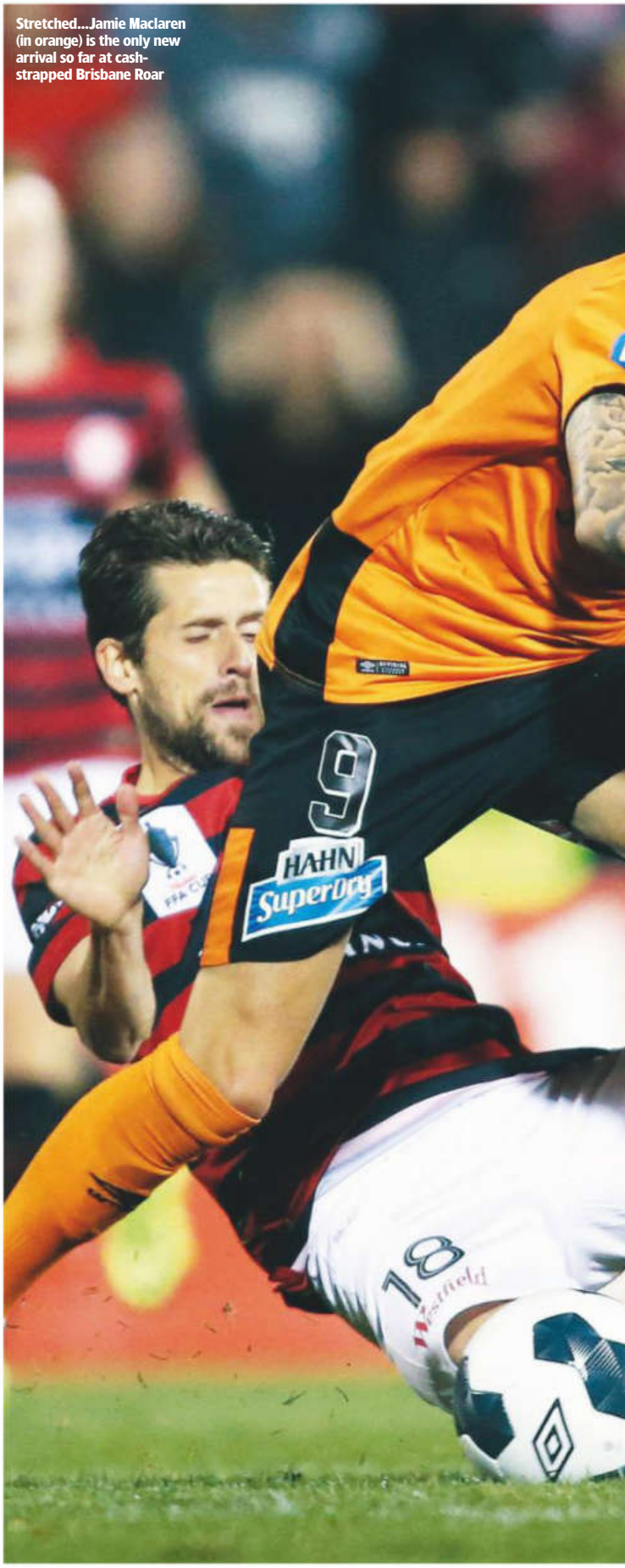
Saturday August 21

CAMEROON: Leopold Angong Oben, a 26-year-old striker with second division side Dynamo de Douala, collapses during a game against Colombe du Dja-et-Lobo and later dies.
GERMANY: Kevin Volland's goal after nine seconds is the joint-fastest in Bundesliga history but Bayern Munich – who have Jerome Boateng sent off – come back to win 2-1 at Hoffenheim with a 90th-minute goal from Robert Lewandowski.
ISRAEL: Eran Zahavi scores twice as Maccabi Tel Aviv begin their defence of the league title with a 3-2 success against Bnei Sakhnin.
MALAYSIA: Johor Darul Ta'zim retain their Malaysian Super League crown despite losing 2-1 at Felda United on the last day of the season as closest challengers Pahang are beaten 3-1 in Terengganu.
RUSSIA: CSKA Moscow make it six wins out of six with a 2-1 victory over Rostov to stay five points clear of city rivals Spartak, who beat Amkar Perm 3-1 earlier in the day.

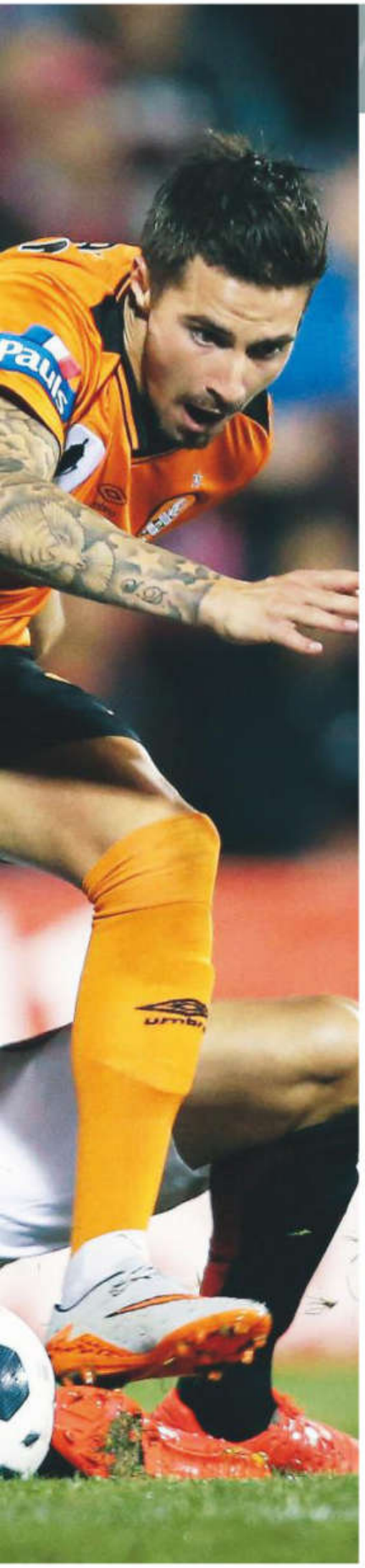
Sunday August 23

ENGLAND: Manchester City maintain their 100 per cent start to the season with a 2-0 victory at Everton, and there is a first win of the campaign for defending champions Chelsea, 3-2 at West Bromwich Albion, despite having John Terry sent off.
FRANCE: New Marseille boss Michel makes a great start as his side thrash Troyes 6-0 at the Stade Velodrome. Lorient keeper Benjamin Lecomte is sent off after 39 seconds as they lose 1-0 at home to Saint-Etienne.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund win 4-0 at Ingolstadt to leapfrog Bayern Munich at the top of the table on goal difference.
GREECE: Olympiakos kick off their Super League season with a 3-0 win against Panionios.
ITALY: Juventus lose at home on the opening weekend of the season for the first time, going down 1-0 to Udinese, while Sinisa Mihajlovic's reign at Milan begins with a 2-0 defeat away to Fiorentina.
PERU: Sporting Cristal claim the apertura championship with a goalless draw at Universitario to finish a point ahead of Melgar and three clear of Deportivo Municipal.
PORTUGAL: Arouca are the surprise early leaders after beating Benfica 1-0 to sit top of the table with maximum points.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi misses a penalty but Barcelona still win 1-0 away to Athletic Bilbao, while Real Madrid draw 0-0 at Sporting Gijon.
USA: Robbie Keane scores twice and sets up a further two goals as Los Angeles Galaxy hammer New York City 5-1.
WALES: The defending league champions TNS beat newly ➤

Upset...Arouca's Jailson (in yellow) battles with Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez of Benfica



Stretched...Jamie Maclaren (in orange) is the only new arrival so far at cash-strapped Brisbane Roar



Australia

SIMON HILL

Money worries cloud build-up to new season

A-League clubs concerned over financial viability

It's not quite been a winter of discontent in the southern hemisphere, but the A-League off-season has posed some serious questions as to the continued health of the young competition.

Financial viability remains problematic for several of Australia's 10 professional clubs, with the situation at Brisbane Roar and Newcastle Jets the most perilous.

Roar, for so long the benchmark on the pitch, are desperately trying to find new owners. The Indonesia-based Bakries family say they can no longer afford to run the three-times champions and have spent the last few months trying to offload the club, without success.

Late payment of wages and lapsed superannuation contributions have displeased both Roar's players and the governing body, the FFA, which is keeping a watching brief on developments in Queensland. Already, midfielder Luke Brattan has demanded release from his contract and others may follow. New coach John Aloisi has, so far, been able to bring in only Jamie Maclaren. A difficult season may follow unless the impasse is resolved.

Newcastle Jets are already in FFA hands after Nathan Tinkler was relieved of his licence in May, leaving a trail of debt behind. A consortium led by Dundee United owner Stephen Thompson is favourite to take over. In the meantime, the FFA has appointed ex-Fulham assistant Scott Miller as the club's new head coach.

The other eight clubs aren't exactly flush with cash, either, and although FFA CEO David Gallop has kept hinting that a new, lucrative TV deal is imminent, the current contract with Fox Sports and SBS is still in place.

By world standards, the value of the contract is modest and the growth of MLS has seriously impacted upon the A-League's ability to attract major stars through the "marquee" player rule.

The FFA has tried to soften this rule by allowing clubs to sign a second overseas player outside the salary cap – beforehand, one had to be Australian – but, so far, there has been little enthusiasm to go for broke, in the way Sydney did with Alessandro Del Piero.

The biggest name to arrive this coming season so far is Thomas Sorensen, the former Aston Villa, Sunderland and Stoke City goalkeeper, who joins Melbourne City, along with ex-Fulham defender Aaron Hughes and Australia internationals Ivan Franjic and Michael Zullo.

Elsewhere, Sydney replaced the departing Marc Janko – last year's Golden Boot winner – with Slovakian striker Filip Holosko, while Serbian attacking midfielder Milos Ninkovic is the sort of player who could attain cult status.

Defending champions Melbourne Victory have kept the majority of their squad intact, but captain Mark Milligan is now in the UAE with Baniyas. Keeper Danny Vukovic is, so far, the only new arrival.

Western Sydney Wanderers, whose domestic campaign was badly hit by success in the Asian Champions League last year, have had the busiest pre-season. Coach Tony Popovic released no fewer than 16 players, bringing nine in, including Spaniards Dimas Delgado, Alberto Aguilar and Andreu Guerao Mayoral.

Adelaide United suffered a major blow when coach Josep Gombau left to take up a role with New York City, although he is replaced by former Barcelona man Guillermo Amor.

Perth Glory, looking to recover from last year's fiasco when they were thrown out of the finals after breaching the salary-cap rules by quite some margin, have made some interesting acquisitions, the pick of which is Spanish winger Diego Castro. The flip side is the loss of top scorer Andy Keogh, who is now in Thailand.

Central Coast Mariners are another club keeping a beady eye on the books and their recruitment has been modest. Irish B international Roy O'Donovan will need to find goals if Tony Walmsley's team are to challenge.

Wellington Phoenix have lost A-League Player of the Year, and their leading goalscorer, Nathan Burns, to Tokyo. His replacement is Jeffrey Sarpong, but given the Dutchman has netted only four times in 79 games during a stop-start career he may struggle to fit the bill.

FFA chairman Frank Lowy will stand down in November after over a decade at the helm of a game that has been revitalised under his watch. Whether the next 10 years will be as successful, only time will tell. WS

KEY DATES

Regular season starts
October 8, 2015
Regular season ends
April 10, 2016
Finals series begins
April 15, 2016
Grand Final
May 1, 2016

Gone...Jets owner Nathan Tinkler (far right) lost his licence

➤ promoted Haverfordwest 4-0 on the opening weekend of the new league season.

Monday August 24

ENGLAND: Liverpool draw 0-0 at Arsenal to leave Manchester City as the only side in the Premier League with nine points after three games.
RUSSIA: Zenit go second in the league with a 3-1 victory at Rubin Kazan, while promoted Krylia Sovetov Samara beat Kuban Krasnodar 3-0.
SPAIN: Only saved from relegation last season because of Elche's financial irregularities, Eibar go top of La Liga with a 3-1 win at Granada.

Tuesday August 25

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal beat Lekhwiya of Qatar 4-1 in the home leg of their quarter-final, while Guangzhou Evergrande of China beat Kashiwa Reysol 3-1 in South Korea.
FRANCE: Quarter-finalists last season, Monaco beat Valencia 2-1 at home but lose 4-3 on aggregate in the play-off round in this term's Champions League.
GEORGIA: Dinamo Tbilisi beat Dila 1-0 in the Georgian Super Cup.
SWEDEN: Malmo overturn a 3-2 first-leg defeat and beat Celtic 2-0 at home to qualify for the group stage of the Champions League.

Wednesday August 26

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Jeonbuk Motors and Gamba Osaka draw 0-0 in the all-Japanese quarter-final first leg, while Al Ahli of the UAE beat Naft Tehran 1-0 in Iran.
CANADA: Vancouver Whitecaps lift the Canadian Championship for the first time, beating Montreal Impact 2-0 at home for a 4-2 aggregate win.
ENGLAND: Wayne Rooney is on the scoresheet for Manchester United for the first time since April with a hat-trick in a 4-0 win away to Club Brugge in the Champions League.
EGYPT: Despite qualifying for the finals, Egypt announce they are withdrawing from the football tournament at September's All-

England

GAVIN HAMILTON

Transfer window bonanza

Premier League riches boost European deals

At least English football leads the way in something, as Premier League clubs signed players worth £870million in the summer transfer window, up from £835m last year. If January 2015 spending is included, a total of more than one billion was spent during a calendar year for the first time.

The English spending was more than double Serie A's summer spend of £405m and the £400m outlay of La Liga clubs. It was three times the Bundesliga sum of £290m and four times Ligue 1's £220m.

Not surprisingly, Manchester City, were the biggest spenders, with more than £150m invested in new players, such as Kevin De Bruyne (£53m) and Raheem Sterling (£49m). At £101.3m, City had the biggest net spend of any club in Europe.

Aside from City's excesses and Manchester United's bungled deal to sell David De Gea to Real Madrid, the biggest story of the summer was the growing financial power of England's middle-ranking clubs.

The total net spend for Premier League clubs was £481m, much of it paid out by the likes of Newcastle United, West Ham United, West Bromwich Albion and Bournemouth. Ahead of next year's bumper TV deal, clubs were able to spend big and attract high-calibre players who would previously only join clubs competing in European competition.

So, Stoke City captured Xherdan Shaqiri, late of Bayern Munich and Internazionale; Crystal Palace

New approach... Swansea signed Andre Ayew (left) on a free

Africa Games in the Congo.
KAZAKHSTAN: Leading 1-0 from the home leg, Astana draw 1-1 with APOEL in Cyprus to become the first Kazakh side to qualify for the group stage of the Champions League.
RUSSIA: CSKA Moscow make it seven wins from seven on Russian soil this season, beating Sporting Lisbon 3-1 to win 4-3 on aggregate in the Champions League.

Thursday August 27

BULGARIA: Lokomotiv Plovdiv say they will continue playing in the league after the domestic football union reduced their fine for fans' racist behaviour.
EUROPA LEAGUE: Marcos Reus scores a hat-trick as Borussia Dortmund thrash Odd of Norway 7-2, while Azerbaijani sides Qarabag and Qabala both reach the group stage. Southampton are knocked out by Danish champions Midtjylland.
FRANCE: Monaco's 19-year-old Anthony Martial gets a first call-up to the national squad, for the friendlies against Portugal and Serbia.
UEFA: Barcelona's Lionel Messi becomes the first player to win UEFA's Best Player in Europe award for a second time.

Friday August 28

FRANCE: Goals from Sloan Privat and Nicolas Benezet give Guingamp a 2-0 victory over Marseille.
GERMANY: Kevin De Bruyne is left out as Wolfsburg beat Schalke 3-0. Liverpool midfielder Emre Can is the only uncapped player in the squad for the upcoming Euro qualifiers against Poland and Scotland.

Saturday August 29

ENGLAND: Jose Mourinho's 100th home game as a manager in the Premier League ends in defeat for only the second time, as Crystal Palace beat Chelsea 2-1.
ITALY: Sassuolo make it two wins out of two with a 1-0 victory away to Bologna.
MALI: Stade Malien complete a domestic double by beating Onze ➤

signed Paris Saint-Germain's Yohan Cabaye; Leicester City did a deal with Napoli for Swiss midfielder Gokhan Inler; and Newcastle signed Georginio Wijnaldum, one of the players of the season in Holland last year with PSV.

Lower-ranking clubs were also able to reject bids from the top six. Everton held out against Chelsea to keep young England centre-back John Stones, while West Brom won a game of brinkmanship with Tottenham Hotspur over Saido Berahino – much to the player's fury.

United's final-day chaos – a botched deal for De Gea and paying way over the odds for teenager Anthony Martial – attracted many headlines. But less attention was paid to clubs such as Swansea City who did their business early on.

In many ways, Swansea are the Premier League's model club, with 20 per cent of the club owned by the Supporters' Trust. This summer, they signalled a change of strategy in the transfer market, paying out more in wages, most notably in the case of free transfer Andre Ayew from Marseille, and less on fees.

English clubs did a lot of business with Bundesliga clubs – but at a price. Tottenham paid €30m to Hamburg for South Korean striker Son Heung-min, while Augsburg made a healthy profit on Ghana full-back Baba Rahman, who was sold to Chelsea for €20m a year after he was bought for €2.5m from second-tier club Greuther Furth.

In contrast, a number of talented players moved between Bundesliga clubs for considerably smaller fees. Gonzalo Castro (Bayer Leverkusen to Borussia Dortmund) and Kevin Kampl (Dortmund to Leverkusen) cost €11m each. Johannes Geis (Mainz to Schalke) and Max Kruse (Borussia Monchengladbach to Wolfsburg) cost €12m each.

Wolfsburg sporting director Klaus Allofs claimed his club could not compete with City's offer for Kevin De Bruyne, saying: "We didn't have a chance to even pay 50 per cent of the wages De Bruyne was offered."

Allofs may baulk at the offer to De Bryne, but Wolfsburg were able to bank a hefty profit on a player signed 18 months ago from Chelsea. And they quickly reinvested a club record €35m on Schalke starlet Julian Draxler.

Top notch...Stoke signed Xherdan Shaqiri

Bayern Munich director Mathias Sammer also claimed to have lost out to English clubs, claiming: "Even Bayern has no chance. We cannot compete financially."

That is not strictly true. Bayern are one of a handful of clubs – along with City, Barcelona and Real Madrid – who can dictate their own terms in the transfer market. Madrid may have messed up the De Gea deal but, with Barcelona under a transfer embargo, they took their eye off the ball this summer.

As for Bayern, they sold Bastian Schweinsteiger to Manchester United because he had slipped down the pecking order. There was never any chance of selling Thomas Muller or Robert Lewandowski to an English club.

Bayern were by far the biggest net spenders in Germany, but there were also big individual spenders in Italy and Spain, notably Valencia, Atletico Madrid, Milan and Juventus

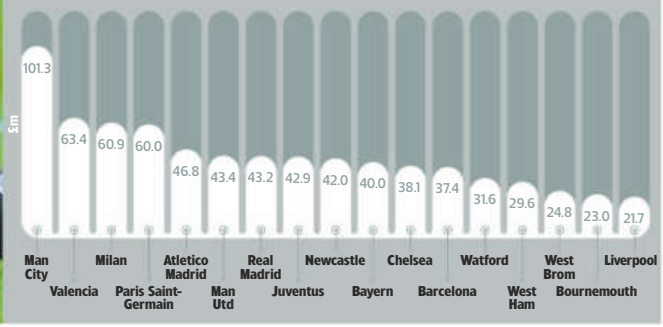
Valencia's new owner Peter Lim spent heavily, including fees paid up for Alvaro Negredo and Rodrigo who joined on loan last season.

Atletico reinforced their position as the third force in Spanish football with some solid reinforcements.

There was increased spending by Serie A clubs, with Juventus boosted by their run to the Champions League Final and Milan having new Thai investors.

Further down the food chain, there was evidence of money trickling down to much smaller clubs. French sixth-tier side Les Ullis, where Anthony Martial began his career, will receive €600,000 as a share of Monaco's deal with United. Les Ullis benefitted from a FIFA regulation that five per cent of international transfers must go to the club that developed the player between the ages of 12 and 21. WS

Transfer window: biggest net spenders



➤ Createurs 2-1 in the Cup Final.
RUSSIA: Zenit lose 3-1 to Samara, while another promoted side, Anzhi, beat Spartak Moscow 2-1.
SPAIN: Celta Vigo go top of La Liga with a 3-0 win over Rayo Vallecano, while Real Madrid thrash Real Betis 5-0 and Barcelona beat Malaga 1-0.

Sunday August 30

ENGLAND: Kevin De Bruyne becomes Britain's second most-expensive signing of all time, with a £53m move from Wolfsburg to Manchester City. Swansea City end Manchester United's unbeaten start to the season with a 2-1 win.
FAROE ISLANDS: Vikingur win a fourth successive Faroese Cup, beating Runavik 3-0 in the Final.
FRANCE: Angel Di Maria makes his Paris Saint-Germain debut as a second-half substitute in their 3-0 win at Monaco.
GERMANY: Thomas Tuchel wins his eighth straight game as Borussia Dortmund coach and the 3-1 victory over Hertha Berlin takes his side back to the top of the table. Borussia Monchengladbach's worst-ever start to a Bundesliga campaign sees them lose 2-1 at Werder Bremen for a third consecutive defeat.
GHANA: Medeama win the Ghanaian FA Cup, beating Asante Kotoko 2-1 in the Final.
ITALY: Juventus lose their opening two Serie A games of the season for the first time in their history as they follow up last week's defeat by Udinese with a 2-1 loss to Roma. Chievo go top of the table with a 4-0 victory over Lazio.

Monday August 31

COOK ISLANDS: Taylor Saghabi scores a hat-trick as the Cook Islands win their first-ever World Cup qualifier, beating hosts Togo 3-0.

Tuesday September 1

CONGO: Jordan Ayew scores a late winner as Ghana win 3-2 in a game to mark the opening of Congo's new 60,000-capacity Kintele Sports Complex in Brazzaville.
ENGLAND: The transfer window closes and Anthony Martial becomes the world's most expensive teenager of all time as he joins Manchester United from Monaco for £36m.

Wednesday September 2

TURKEY: FIFA announces that Galatasaray's €6.6m signing of Borussia Dortmund winger Kevin Grosskreutz on Monday was not registered in time and he will not be able to play competitively for his new club until January. WS

Maldives

STEVE MENARY

Coach quits despite first win

Popov leaves after Indian Ocean Island Games

Velizar Popov has had enough. The Bulgarian believes that the Maldives' performance at this summer's Indian Ocean Island Games was a success, but he still quit two-thirds of the way through his job as national coach. Although his team finished bottom of their group, they did win a game, beating Seychelles 2-1 at the Stade Baby-Lariviere in Reunion. In three previous appearances in the Games' football competition, which has been held nine times since 1979, the Maldives lost all six matches, and in their last appearance they were thrashed 5-1 by Seychelles.

For Popov, the victory in August was particularly satisfying as his side were without striker Ali Ashfaq, who plays in the Malaysian Premier League for PDRM, and goalkeeper Imran Mohamed.

"We participated without six key players," says Popov. "We gave chances to the young players and there were three debutants in the starting XI in all three matches. Against Seychelles, the team played one of their best matches in the last two or three years."

Victory was secured with goals from newcomers Mohamed Umair and Ahmed Imaz, who both play for Maldivian club Maziya. Umair also scored in the opening 3-1 loss to eventual runners-up Mayotte, and the Maldives would have made the semi-finals if they had not lost 4-0 to Madagascar in their final game.

Popov insists the Games were "very positive" but says: "I terminated my contract after some personal discussions with [the Football Association of Maldives], I can't agree with many things and I don't want anymore to make compromises with my professional reputation."

> "I don't want anymore to make compromises with my professional reputation"
> Velizar Popov on quitting as Maldives coach

Popov's contract was due to run until after this year's SAFF Championship, which is being staged in India in December. The Maldives won the 2008 tournament and victory in Trivandrum was a realistic target.

But, instead, the 39-year-old is now back in Bulgaria and planning a return to club football, which provided him with a springboard into international management.

Under the former Lokomotiv Plovdiv player, Maldivian club New Radiant won the Dhivehi League, the Super Cup, FA Cup and President's Cup in 2013, and he also led the side to the AFC Cup quarter-finals.

After spells with Sur Club in Oman and Suphanburi in Thailand, Popov returned to the Maldives in January this year to replace Croatia's Drago Mamic as head of the national side. And in their first qualifier for the 2018 World Cup, the Maldives only lost 1-0 at home to Qatar with a goal in the ninth minute of injury time.

Frustrated... Velizar Popov

However, a 2-0 defeat in Hong Kong ensued and Popov concedes that the team's chances of finishing in the top two of Group C are now very slim, claiming: "The problems in Maldivian football at the moment are very serious and the level has not improved an inch since I was here two years ago.

"Here the politic is to not use players of other nationality – compared with Qatar and Hong Kong, who have six or seven foreign players which make the difference for them.

"Maldives is a small country, but the people are proud and want to play only with Maldivian players in the national team."

Given that only Ashfaq and Mohamed Arif, who is with Kanbawza in Myanmar, play professionally overseas, the Maldives' early World Cup results were not bad. But Popov warns: "Football is not just a game anymore, it's a business. And to fight big, rich countries like China, Qatar or Hong Kong it is not enough just to be good or play well in some matches.

"Drastic changes are needed, starting with better facilities for the clubs and the kids in the youth academies. More money is needed to invest in the clubs and import foreign players, which can help local players to improve their level.

"The most important thing is to make the local league better and more competitive. At the moment, the level of the league is the biggest problem." WS

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA SUPER CUP

(Champions League holders, Barcelona v Europa League holders, Sevilla)

Aug11 - Tbilisi, Georgia
Barcelona (Spa) 5 (Messi 7, 16, Rafinha 44, Suarez 52, Pedro 115)
Sevilla (Spa) 4 (Banega 3, Reyes 57, Gameiro pen 72, Konoplyanka 81)
Aet. **HT:** 3-1. **90mins:** 4-4. **Att:** 51,940.
Ref: Collum (Sco)
Barcelona: Ter Stegen - Daniel Alves, Pique, Mascherano (Pedro 93), Mathieu, Rakitic, Busquets, Iniesta (Sergi Roberto 63), Messi, Suarez, Rafinha (Bartra 78).
Sevilla: Beto - Tremoulinas, Krychowiak, Rami, Coke, Vitolo, Banega, Iborra (Mariano 80), Krohn-Dehli, Reyes (Konoplyanka 68), Gameiro (Immobile 80).

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

3rd qualifying round

(teams marked with asterisk entered at this stage)
1st legs - July 28/29; 2nd legs - Aug 4/5
Celtic (Sco) v Qarabag (Aze) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
CSKA Moscow* (Rus) v Sparta Prague* (CzR)
2-2, 3-2 (agg 5-4)
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) v Molde (Nor)
1-1, 3-3 (agg 4-4, Dinamo on away goals)
Fenerbahce* (Tur) v Shakhtar Donetsk* (Ukr)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
HJK Helsinki (Fin) v Astana (Kaz) 0-0, 3-4 (agg 3-4)
Lech Poznan (Pol) v Basle* (Swi) 1-3, 0-1 (agg 1-4)
Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) v Plzen* (CzR)
1-2, 2-0 (agg 3-2)
Midtjylland (Den) v APOEL Nicosia (Cyp)
1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, APOEL on away goals)
Milsami (Mol) v Skenderbeu (Alb)
0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4)
Panathinaikos* (Gre) v Club Brugge* (Blg)
2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4)
Rapid Vienna* (Aut) v Ajax* (Hol) 2-2, 3-2 (agg 5-4)
Salzburg* (Aut) v Malmo (Swe) 2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3)
Steaua Bucharest (Rom) v Partizan Belgrade (Ser)
1-1, 2-4 (agg 3-5)
Videoton (Hun) v BATE Borisov (Bls)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Young Boys* (Swi) v Monaco* (Fra) 1-3, 0-4 (agg 1-7)

● *Losers entered Europa League at the final qualifying round stage*

Final qualifying round

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
1st legs - Aug18/19; 2nd legs - Aug 25/26
Astana v APOEL Nicosia 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Basle v Maccabi Tel Aviv
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3, Maccabi on away goals)
BATE Borisov v Partizan Belgrade
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, BATE on away goals)
Celtic v Malmo 3-2, 0-2 (agg 3-4)
Lazio (Ita) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Manchester United (Eng) v Club Brugge
3-1, 4-0 (agg 7-1)
Rapid Vienna v Shakhtar Donetsk
0-1, 2-2 (agg 2-3)
Skenderbeu v Dinamo Zagreb 1-2, 1-4 (agg 2-6)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v CSKA Moscow
2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)
Valencia (Spa) v Monaco 3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3)

● *Winners qualified for the group stage; losers enter Europa League at group stage*

Group stage fixtures

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)

Group A
Sep 15: Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) v Malmo; Real Madrid (Spa) v Shakhtar Donetsk.
Sep 30: Malmo v Real Madrid; Shakhtar v PSG.
Oct 21: Malmo v Shakhtar; PSG v Real Madrid.
Nov 3: Real Madrid v PSG; Shakhtar v Malmo.
Nov 25: Malmo v PSG; Shakhtar v Real Madrid.
Dec 8: PSG v Shakhtar; Real Madrid v Malmo.

Group B
Sep 15: PSV Eindhoven (Hol) v Manchester United; Wolfsburg (Ger) v CSKA Moscow.
Sep 30: CSKA Moscow v PSV; Man U v Wolfsburg.
Oct 21: CSKA Moscow v Man U; Wolfsburg v PSV.
Nov 3: Man U v CSKA Moscow; PSV v Wolfsburg.
Nov 25: CSKA Moscow v Wolfsburg; Man U v PSV.
Dec 8: PSV v CSKA Moscow; Wolfsburg v Man U.

Group C
Sep 15: Benfica (Por) v Astana; Galatasaray (Tur) v Atletico Madrid (Spa).
Sep 30: Astana v Galatasaray; Atl Madrid v Benfica.
Oct 21: Atl Madrid v Astana; Galatasaray v Benfica.
Nov 3: Astana v Atl Madrid; Benfica v Galatasaray.
Nov 25: Astana v Benfica; Atl Madrid v Galatasaray.
Dec 8: Benfica v Atl Madrid; Galatasaray v Astana.

Group D
Sep 15: Manchester City (Eng) v Juventus (Ita); Sevilla (Spa) v Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger).
Sep 30: Juventus v Sevilla; M'gladbach v Man City.
Oct 21: Juventus v M'gladbach; Man City v Sevilla.
Nov 3: M'gladbach v Juventus; Sevilla v Man City.
Nov 25: Juventus v Man City; M'gladbach v Sevilla.
Dec 8: Man City v M'gladbach; Sevilla v Juventus.

Group E
Sep 16: Bayer Leverkusen v BATE Borisov; Roma (Ita) v Barcelona (Spa).
Sep 29: Barcelona v Leverkusen; BATE v Roma.
Oct 20: BATE v Barcelona; Leverkusen v Roma.
Nov 4: Barcelona v BATE; Roma v Leverkusen.
Nov 24: Barcelona v Roma; BATE v Leverkusen.
Dec 9: Leverkusen v Barcelona; Roma v BATE.

Group F
Sep 16: Dinamo Zagreb v Arsenal (Eng); Olympiakos (Gre) v Bayern Munich (Ger).
Sep 29: Arsenal v Olympiakos; Bayern v Dinamo Z.
Oct 20: Arsenal v Bayern; Dinamo Z v Olympiakos.
Nov 4: Bayern v Arsenal; Olympiakos v Dinamo Z.
Nov 24: Arsenal v Dinamo Z; Bayern v Olympiakos.
Dec 9: Dinamo Z v Bayern; Olympiakos v Arsenal.

Group G
Sep 16: Chelsea (Eng) v Maccabi Tel Aviv; Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) v Porto (Por).
Sep 29: M Tel Aviv v Dynamo K; Porto v Chelsea.
Oct 20: Dynamo K v Chelsea; Porto v M Tel Aviv.
Nov 4: Chelsea v Dynamo K; M Tel Aviv v Porto.
Nov 24: M Tel Aviv v Chelsea; Porto v Dynamo K.
Dec 9: Chelsea v Porto; Dynamo K v M Tel Aviv.

Group H
Sep 16: Gent (Blg) v Lyon (Fra); Valencia v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus).
Sep 29: Lyon v Valencia; Zenit v Gent.
Oct 20: Valencia v Gent; Zenit v Lyon.
Nov 4: Gent v Valencia; Lyon v Zenit.
Nov 24: Lyon v Gent; Zenit v Valencia.
Dec 9: Gent v Zenit; Valencia v Lyon.

● *The top 2 in each group qualify for the1st knockout round (last16); the 3rd-placed teams enter the Europa League at the1st knockout round stage (last 32)*

EUROPA LEAGUE

3rd qualifying round

(teams marked with asterisk entered at this stage)
1st legs - July 29/30; 2nd legs - Aug 6
AIK Stockholm (Swe) v Atromitos* (Gre)
1-3, 0-1 (agg 1-4)
Altach* (Aut) v Vitoria Guimaraes* (Por)
2-1, 4-1 (agg 6-2)
Apollon (Cyp) v Qabala (Aze) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Athletic Bilbao* (Spa) v Inter Baku (Aze)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
AZ Alkmaar* (Hol) v Basaksehir* (Tur)
2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1)
Belenenses* (Por) v IFK Gothenburg (Swe)
2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
Bordeaux* (Fra) v AEK Larnaca* (Cyp)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
Brondby (Den) v Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, Brondby on away goals)
Charleroi (Blg) v Zorya* (Ukr) 0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
Debrecen (Hun) v Rosenborg (Nor)
2-3, 1-3 (agg 3-6)
Elfsborg (Swe) v Odd (Nor) 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Hajduk Split (Cro) v Stromsgodset (Nor)
2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Jablonec* (CzR) v Copenhagen (Den)
0-1, 3-2 (agg 3-3, Jablonec on away goals)
Kairat (Kaz) v Aberdeen (Sco) 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
Krasnodar* (Rus) v Slovan Bratislava (Slk)
2-0, 3-3 (agg 5-3)
Kukesi (Alb) v Legia Warsaw (Pol)
0-3 (awarded), 0-1 (agg 0-4)
PAOK Salonika (Gre) v Spartak Trnava (Slk)
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Rabotnicki (Mac) v Trabzonspor (Tur)
1-0, 1-1 (aet) (agg 2-1)
Sampdoria* (Ita) v Vojvodina (Ser)
0-4, 2-0 (agg 2-4)
Slovan Liberec* (CzR) v Kiryat Shmona* (Isr)
2-1, 3-0 (agg 5-1)
Southampton* (Eng) v Vitesse Arnhem* (Hol)
3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0)
Standard Liege* (Blg) v Zeljeznicar (Bos)
2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1)
Sturm Graz* (Aut) v Rubin Kazan* (Rus)
2-3, 1-1 (agg 3-4)
Targu Mures* (Rom) v Saint-Etienne* (Fra)
0-3, 2-1 (agg 2-4)
Thun (Swi) v Vaduz (Lie)
0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, Thun on away goals)
West Ham United (Eng) v Astra (Rom)
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)
Wolfsberger (Aut) v Borussia Dortmund* (Ger)
0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Zilina (Slk) v Vorskla* (Ukr)
2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Zilina on away goals)
Zurich* (Swi) v Dinamo Minsk (Bls) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)

Final qualifying round

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage, all of them losers from the Champions League 3rd qualifying round)
1st legs - Aug 20; 2nd legs - Aug 27
Ajax (Hol) v Jablonec 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Altach v Belenenses 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Astra v AZ Alkmaar 3-2, 0-2 (agg 3-4)
Atromitos v Fenerbahce (Tur) 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Bordeaux v Kairat
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Bordeaux on away goals)
Dinamo Minsk v Salzburg (Aut)
2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2, Dinamo 3-2 on pens)
Krasnodar v HJK Helsinki (Fin) 5-1, 0-0 (agg 5-1)
Lech Poznan (Pol) v Videoton (Hun)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
Milsami (Mol) v Saint-Etienne 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Molde (Nor) v Standard Liege
2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Molde on away goals)
Odd v Borussia Dortmund 3-4, 2-7 (agg 5-11)
PAOK Salonika v Brondby 5-0, 1-1 (agg 6-1)
Plzen (CzR) v Vojvodina 3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0)
Qabala v Panathinaikos (Gre)
0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, Qabala on away goals)
Rabotnicki v Rubin Kazan 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Slovan Liberec v Hajduk Split 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0)
Southampton v Midtjylland (Den) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Sparta Prague (CzR) v Thun 3-1, 3-3 (agg 6-4)
Steaua Bucharest (Rom) v Rosenborg
0-3, 1-0 (agg 1-3)
Young Boys (Swi) v Qarabag (Aze)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Zilina v Athletic Bilbao
3-2, 0-1 (agg 3-3, Athletic on away goals)
Zorya v Legia Warsaw 0-1, 2-3 (agg 2-4)

● *Winners qualified for the group stage*

SOUTH AMERICA

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round

1st legs - Aug11-13; 2nd legs - Aug18-20
Aguilas Doradas (Col) v Union Comercio (Per)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Aurora (Bol) v Sportivo Luqueno (Par)
1-2, 1-5 (agg 2-7)
Carabobo (Ven) v Tolima (Col)
0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0, Tolima 3-1 on pens)
Defensor Sporting (Uru) v Bolivar (Bol)
3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)
Junior (Col) v Melgar (Per)
5-0, 0-4 (agg 5-4)
Juventud (Uru) v Real Potosi (Bol)
4-1, 0-2 (agg 4-3)
LDU Loja (Ecu) v Santa Fe (Col)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Leon (Per) v Emelec (Ecu)
1-3, 0-3 (agg 1-6)
Nacional (Par) v Universidad Concepcion (Chl)
2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2)
Olimpia (Par) v Huachipato (Chl)
2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) v Nacional (Uru)
0-3, 0-0 (agg 0-3)
Santiago Wanderers (Chl) v Libertad (Par)
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
Universidad Catolica (Chl) v Danubio (Uru)
1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Universidad Catolica (Ecu) v La Guaira (Ven)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Universitario (Per) v Anzoategui (Ven)
3-1, 3-1 (agg 6-2)
Zamora (Ven) v LDU Quito (Ecu)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)

PERU

2015 – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sp'g Cristal (C)	16	9	4	3	25	16	31
Melgar	16	8	6	2	22	11	30
Municipal	16	7	7	2	19	13	28
Real Garcilaso	16	8	4	4	22	20	28
Alianza Lima	16	8	2	6	20	14	26
U Comercio	16	7	5	4	21	19	26
Cesar Vallejo	16	6	6	4	24	20	24
Juan Aurich	16	6	4	6	24	18	22
Sp Huancayo	16	5	7	4	19	17	22
Alianza Atl'ico	16	6	3	7	19	20	21
Cienciano	16	5	4	7	23	23	19
Leon	16	5	3	8	21	28	18
Sport Loreto	16	4	5	7	14	18	17
Universitario	16	3	6	7	10	17	15
Ayacucho	16	4	3	9	15	25	15
UT Cajamarca	16	3	5	8	21	31	14
U San Martin	16	3	4	9	14	23	13

CONCACAF

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

2015 Championship Final

Aug 9
Atletico Pantoja 2 Atlantico 2
(aet, Atletico Pantoja 3-1 on pens)

ASIA

BANGLADESH

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S'kh Jamal (C)	20	16	3	1	60	22	51
S'kh Russel	20	13	3	4	41	25	42
Mohammedan	20	11	5	4	38	17	38
Abahani D'ka	20	10	5	5	32	13	35
Brothers Union	20	10	5	5	29	21	35
Muktijoddha	20	8	4	8	31	31	28
BJMC	20	6	4	10	26	28	22
Feni	20	5	3	12	26	42	18
Abahani Chit	20	3	7	10	13	35	16
Rahmatganj	20	3	5	12	21	39	14
Farashganj (R)	20	0	6	14	15	59	6

MALAYSIA

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Johor DT (C)	22	14	4	4	36	18	46
Pahang	22	13	5	4	43	29	44
Selangor	22	11	6	5	43	28	39
Terengganu	22	12	2	8	40	33	38
Felda United	22	10	6	6	36	26	36
PDRM	22	11	2	9	42	39	35
Lions XII	22	9	6	7	36	32	33
Perak	22	8	4	10	32	33	28
Kelantan	22	8	4	10	34	38	28
Sarawak	22	4	7	11	28	40	19
ATM (R)	22	2	5	15	21	47	11
Sime Darby (R)	22	1	7	14	20	48	10

PHILIPPINES

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ceres (C)	17	14	1	2	59	13	43
Global	17	10	5	2	50	15	35
Loyola	17	11	2	4	46	26	35
Kaya	17	10	1	6	47	23	31
Stallion	17	10	1	6	36	24	31
Green Archers	17	7	3	7	36	33	24
M'la Jeepney	17	4	4	9	30	48	16
Pachanga	17	3	3	11	27	52	12
Socceroo (R)[1]	17	1	1	15	7	69	4
Phil Army[2] (R)	9	0	1	8	3	38	1

[1]*Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*
[2]*Withdrew after 9 rounds*

SYRIA

2014-15 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Jaish[1] (C)	5	3	1	1	6	2	13
Al Shorta[2]	5	3	0	2	8	4	11
Al Wahda[1]	5	2	2	1	8	7	11
Al Majd[3]	5	2	1	2	6	7	8
Musfat B'yas[3]	5	1	2	2	5	10	6
Al Muhafaza[2]	5	0	2	3	6	9	4

Bonus pts were awarded for finishing position in regular-season groups – [1]3pts for winning, [2]2pts for coming 2nd, [3]1pt for coming 3rd

AFRICA

EGYPT

2014-15 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zamalek (C)	38	26	9	3	69	21	87
Al Ahly	38	23	10	5	65	26	79
ENPPI	38	18	16	4	65	29	70
Misr El Makasa	38	18	10	10	57	51	64
Wadi Degla	38	14	15	9	46	36	57
Al Mokawloon	38	15	10	13	47	41	55
Ismaily[1]	38	14	19	5	44	32	55
Haras Hodood	38	12	16	10	30	31	52
Al Gaish	38	15	7	16	49	56	52
Smouha	38	14	9	15	43	37	51
Al Masry	38	13	11	14	37	41	50
Petrojet	38	13	10	15	49	53	49
El Daklyeh	38	12	13	13	43	41	49
Al Ittihad	38	11	15	12	39	38	48
El Shorta	38	10	17	11	36	42	47
El Gouna (R)	38	10	16	12	33	35	46
Al Raja (R)	38	11	10	17	47	57	43
Al Nasr[2] (R)	38	8	8	22	34	70	29
Alassiouty (R)	38	2	10	26	40	88	16
Alaab Da'r (R)	38	3	5	30	34	82	14

[1]6pts deducted for failing to pay an agent
[2]3pts deducted for refusing to play a game

GABON

2015 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mangasport (C)	24	18	6	0	40	11	60
Missile	24	11	7	6	28	19	40
Mounana	24	10	9	5	28	16	39
FC 105	24	11	6	7	32	21	39
Akanda	24	11	5	8	26	23	38
US Bitam	24	9	6	9	28	26	33
Centre Mberi	24	8	7	9	17	21	31
Pelican	24	8	6	10	30	25	30
Oyem	24	7	7	10	23	31	28
Std Migoveen	24	5	9	10	17	25	24
Port-Gentil	24	7	3	14	23	42	24
Solidarite (R)	24	6	4	14	22	39	22
O'Mb'ziani (R)	24	5	5	14	24	39	20

GUINEA

2014-15 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Horoya (C)	22	14	5	3	44	18	47
Kaloum	22	11	7	4	24	13	40
Soumba	22	8	8	6	25	18	32
Satellite	22	8	7	7	24	18	31
Atl Coleah	22	8	7	7	26	21	31
Ashanti GB	22	8	6	8	16	26	30
Hafia	22	6	11	5	22	18	29
Fello Star	22	8	5	9	21	19	29
CI Kamsar	22	7	6	9	17	21	27
Gangan	22	6	6	10	19	31	24
Santoba (R)	22	4	8	10	16	28	20
Sequence (R)	22	3	6	13	16	39	15

IVORY COAST

2014-15 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tanda (C)	26	14	9	3	21	11	51
ASEC	26	15	5	6	26	16	50
SC Gagnoa	26	11	10	5	20	10	43
Africa Sports	26	12	3	11	21	23	39
Stade Abidjan	26	10	7	9	34	25	37
Sewe Sport	26	9	9	8	29	29	36
SOA	26	10	5	11	25	24	35
AFAD	26	10	4	12	28	26	34
Abengourou	26	8	9	9	16	17	33
Korhogo	26	7	9	10	16	23	30
JCAT	26	7	8	11	23	26	29
Denguele	26	7	7	12	16	20	28
Bouake (R)	26	5	10	11	21	32	25
Stella (R)	26	6	7	13	13	27	25

Internationals

EAST ASIAN CUP FINALS

Played in Wuhan, China

Aug 2
North Korea 2 (Ri Hyok-chol 78, Pak Hyon-il 88)
Japan 1 (Muto 3)
HT: 0-1
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Jang Kuk-chol, Kang Kuk-chol, Sim Hyon-jin, Ri Yong-chol, Jong Il-gwan, Ro Hak-su, So Hyon-uk (Pak Hyon-il 66), Ri Chol-myong, Ri Hyok-chol (Kim Yong-gwang 90+1), Hong Kum-song (So Kyong-jin 83).
Japan: Nishikawa - Makino, Morishige, Fujiharu, Endo, Taniguchi, Yamaguchi, Muto, Nagai (Asano 84), Usami (Shibasaki 55), Kawamata (Koroki 72).

Aug 2
China 0
South Korea 2 (Kim Seung-dae 45, Lee Jong-ho 57)
HT: 0-1
China: Wang Dalei - Ren Hang, Feng Xiaoting, Cai Huikang, Ji Xiang, Zheng Zhi, Wang Yongpo (Liu Jianye 74), Wu Xi, Yu Hai (Yu Dabao 63), Wu Lei, Gao Lin (Sun Ke 46).
South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Hong Chul, Kim Ju-young, Rim Chang-woo, Kim Young-gwon, Lee Jong-ho (Jung Woo-young 89), Kim Seung-dae, Lee Jae-sung (Lee Yong-jae 79), Jang Hyun-soo, Kwon Chang-hoon, Lee Jeong-hyeop (Kim Shin-wook 84).

Aug 5
Japan 1 (Yamaguchi 39)
South Korea 1 (Jang Hyun-soo 26)
HT: 1-1
Japan: Nishikawa - Ota, Makino, Morishige, Endo, Shibasaki, Fujita, Yamaguchi, Nagai (Asano 70), Koroki (Usami 78), Kurata (Kawamata 88).
South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Jeong Dong-ho, Kim Kee-hee, Lee Ju-yong (Hong Chul 64), Kim Young-gwon, Jung Woo-young, Kim Min-woo, Ju Se-jong (Lee Jae-sung 64), Lee Yong-jae, Jang Hyun-soo (Kwon Chang-hoon 80), Kim Shin-wook.

Aug 5
China 2 (Yu Dabao 36, Wang Yongpo 51)
North Korea 0
HT: 1-0
China: Zen Cheng - Lei Tenglong, Wang Tong (Ren Hang 72), Yu Yang, Liu Jianye, Rao Weihui, Zheng Zhi, Wang Yongpo (Wu Xi 62), Sun Ke (Liu Binbin 46), Yang Xu, Yu Dabao.
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Jang Kuk-chol, Kang Kuk-chol, Sim Hyon-jin, Ri Yong-chol, Jong Il-gwan, Ro Hak-su, So Hyon-uk (Pak Hyon-il 64), Ri Chol-myong, Ri Hyok-chol, Hong Kum-song (So Kyong-jin 57).

Aug 9
South Korea 0
North Korea 0
South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Kim Kee-hee, Lee Ju-yong, Rim Chang-woo (Jeong Dong-ho 86), Kim Young-gwon, Lee Jong-ho (Jung Woo-young 66), Kim Seung-dae, Lee Jae-sung (Kim Shin-wook 88), Jang Hyun-soo, Kwon Chang-hoon, Lee Jeong-hyeop.
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Jang Kuk-chol, Kang Kuk-chol, Sim Hyon-jin, Ri Yong-chol, Jong Il-gwan, So Kyong-jin, Ro Hak-su (Pak Hyon-il 65), Ri Chol-myong, Ri Hyok-chol, Hong Kum-song (So Hyon-uk 38).

Aug 9
China 1 (Wu Lei 10)
Japan 1 (Muto 41)
HT: 1-1
China: Wang Dalei - Ren Hang, Feng Xiaoting, Cai Huikang, Liu Jianye, Ji Xiang, Rao Weihui, Wu Xi (Zheng Zhi 69), Wu Lei, Gao Lin (Zhang Chiming 80), Yu Dabao (Yang Xu 63).
Japan: Higashiguchi - Makino, Morishige, Niwa, Endo, Yonekura, Yamaguchi, Muto (Shibasaki 74), Nagai (Asano 84), Usami, Kawamata (Koroki 61).

EAST ASIAN CUP FINALS – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sth Korea (C)	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
China	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
North Korea	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Japan	3	0	2	1	3	4	2

INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND GAMES

Played in Reunion

Group A

July 31 - Saint-Benoit
Mayotte 3 (Rasolonirina 54, Noussoura 83, Yahaya 88)
Maldives 1 (Umair 12)
HT: 0-1

July 31 - Saint-Denis
Seychelles 3 Madagascar 0 (awarded)
Madagascar failed to show because of visa problems

Aug 2 - Saint-Pierre
Madagascar 1 (Vombola 75)
Mayotte 1 (Faissoil 51)
HT: 0-0
Madagascar 3-1 on pens (drawn games decided on pens)

Aug 2 - Saint-Andre
Maldives 2 (Umair pen 28, Imaz 43)
Seychelles 1 (Esther 5)
HT: 2-1

Aug 4 - Saint-Andre
Madagascar 4 (Simouri x2, Rakotoharimalala, Vombola)
Maldives 0

Aug 4 - Saint-Pierre
Mayotte 1 (Rasolonirina pen 66)
Seychelles 0
HT: 0-0

INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND GAMES – GROUP A	P	W	DW/DL	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Mayotte (Q)	3	2	0/1	0	5	2	9
Madag'car (Q)	3	1	1/0	1	5	4	6
Seychelles	3	1	0/0	2	4	3	4
Maldives	3	1	0/0	2	3	8	4

Group B

July 31 - Saint-Pierre
Reunion 1 (Fontaine 19)
Mauritius 0
HT: 1-0

Aug 2 - Le Port
Mauritius 3 Comoros 0 (awarded)
Comoros withdrew

Aug 4 - Saint-Denis
Reunion 3 Comoros 0 (awarded)
Comoros withdrew

INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND GAMES – GROUP B	P	W	DW/DL	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Reunion (Q)	2	2	0/0	0	4	0	8
Mauritius (Q)	2	1	0/0	1	3	1	4
Comoros	2	0	0/0	2	0	6	0

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw (with shoot-out win), 1pt for a draw (with shoot-out loss)

● *Top 2 in both groups qualified for semi-finals*

Semi-finals

Aug 6 - Saint-Pierre
Reunion 1 (Loricourt 117)
Madagascar 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0

Aug 6 - Saint-Denis
Mayotte 2 (Yahaya 61, Kamal 68)
Mauritius 1 (Sophie 55)
HT: 0-0

3rd-place match

Aug 7 - Le Port
Madagascar 1 (Simouri)
Mauritius 3 (Sophie x2, Perticot)
HT: 1-1

Final

Aug 8 - Saint-Denis
Reunion 3 (Fontaine 7, 31, Boesso 57)
Mayotte 1 (Attoumani 90+1)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 5,500. **Ref:** Kanoso (Mad)

FRIENDLIES

Wednesday, August 19

Aug19 - Ba
Fiji 5 (Tiwa 7, 55, Singh 16, Vakatalesau 43, Qasevakatini pen 85)
Tonga 0
HT: 3-0

Thursday, August 20

Aug 20 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 2 (Samoeun 28, Sokpheng 58)
Bhutan 0
HT: 1-0

Wednesday, August 26

Aug 26 - Sidon
Lebanon 2 (Abbas Ahmed Atwi 52, Jradi 62)
Iraq 3 (Abdul-Raheem 41, Qasim 86, Abdul-Zahra 90+5)
HT: 0-1

Thursday, August 27

Aug 27 - Nadi
Fiji 6 (Kerevanua pen 8, Tiwa 54, Qasevakatini 61, 80, Waranivalu 72, Vakatalesau 74)
American Samoa 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Achari (Fij)
Sent off: Sivoki (Fiji) 31; Beauchamp (American Samoa) 31

Friday, August 28

Aug 28 - Seeb
Oman 1 (Al Mashari 11)
Yemen 0
HT: 1-0

Aug 28 - Doha
Qatar 4 (Musa 57, Muntari 69, Al Haidos 79, I Mohammad 80)
Singapore 0
HT: 0-0

Aug 28 - Kigali
Rwanda 3 (Sugira 18, Tuyisenge 65, Mugiraneza 73)
Ethiopia 1 (Gezahegn 41)
HT: 1-1

Aug 28 - Kingstown
St Vincent & The Grenadines 2 (G James 41, Slater 71)
Barbados 2 (Harte 82, 89)
HT: 1-0

Aug 28 - Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates 1 (Al Akbari 45+2)
Myanmar 0
HT: 1-0

Saturday, August 29

Aug 29 - Bangkok, Thailand
Laos 2 (Khantavong 11, 47)
Cambodia 1 (Chantha Bin 45)
HT: 1-1

Aug 29 - Kartepe, Turkey
Libya 2 (Al Ghanodi 26, Abeddayem 75)
Tanzania 1 (Bocco pen 58)
HT: 1-0

Aug 29 - Shah Alam
Malaysia 0
Bangladesh 0

Sunday, August 30

Aug 30 - Niamey
Niger 0
Burkina Faso 0

Monday, August 31

Aug 31 - Pune
India 0
Nepal 0

Aug 31 - Sidon
Lebanon 0
Palestine 0

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Europe section fixtures

● *13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts Russia, who qualify automatically). The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best record will be paired in 4 play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals*

Group A

2016
Sep 6 Belarus v France
Bulgaria v Luxembourg
Sweden v Holland
Oct 7 France v Bulgaria
Holland v Belarus
Luxembourg v Sweden
Oct 10 Belarus v Luxembourg
Holland v France
Sweden v Bulgaria
Nov 13 Bulgaria v Belarus
France v Sweden
Luxembourg v Holland

2017
Mar 25 Bulgaria v Holland
Luxembourg v France
Sweden v Belarus
Jun 9 Belarus v Bulgaria
Holland v Luxembourg
Sweden v France
Aug 31 Bulgaria v Sweden
France v Holland
Luxembourg v Belarus
Sep 3 Belarus v Sweden
France v Luxembourg
Holland v Bulgaria
Oct 7 Belarus v Holland
Bulgaria v France
Sweden v Luxembourg
Oct 10 France v Belarus
Holland v Sweden
Luxembourg v Bulgaria

Group B

2016
Sep 6 Andorra v Latvia
Faroe Islands v Hungary
Switzerland v Portugal
Oct 7 Hungary v Switzerland
Latvia v Faroe Islands
Portugal v Andorra
Oct 10 Andorra v Switzerland
Faroe Islands v Portugal
Latvia v Hungary
Nov 13 Hungary v Andorra
Portugal v Latvia
Switzerland v Faroe Islands

2017
Mar 25 Andorra v Faroe Islands
Portugal v Hungary
Switzerland v Latvia
Jun 9 Andorra v Hungary
Faroe Islands v Switzerland
Latvia v Portugal
Aug 31 Hungary v Latvia
Portugal v Faroe Islands
Switzerland v Andorra
Sep 3 Faroe Islands v Andorra
Hungary v Portugal
Latvia v Switzerland
Oct 7 Andorra v Portugal
Faroe Islands v Latvia
Switzerland v Hungary
Oct 10 Hungary v Faroe Islands
Latvia v Andorra
Portugal v Switzerland

Group C

2016
Sep 4 Czech Republic v Northern Ireland
Norway v Germany
San Marino v Azerbaijan
Oct 8 Azerbaijan v Norway
Germany v Czech Republic
Northern Ireland v San Marino
Oct 11 Czech Republic v Azerbaijan
Germany v Northern Ireland
Norway v San Marino
Nov 11 Czech Republic v Norway
Northern Ireland v Azerbaijan
San Marino v Germany

2017
Mar 26 Azerbaijan v Germany
Northern Ireland v Norway
San Marino v Czech Republic
Jun 10 Azerbaijan v Northern Ireland
Germany v San Marino
Norway v Czech Republic
Sep 1 Czech Republic v Germany
Norway v Azerbaijan
San Marino v Northern Ireland
Sep 4 Azerbaijan v San Marino
Germany v Norway
Northern Ireland v Czech Republic
Oct 5 Azerbaijan v Czech Republic
Northern Ireland v Germany
San Marino v Norway
Oct 8 Czech Republic v San Marino
Germany v Azerbaijan
Norway v Northern Ireland

Group D

2016
Sep 5 Georgia v Austria
Serbia v Republic of Ireland
Wales v Moldova
Oct 6 Austria v Wales
Moldova v Serbia
Republic of Ireland v Georgia
Oct 9 Moldova v Republic of Ireland
Serbia v Austria
Wales v Georgia
Nov 12 Austria v Republic of Ireland
Georgia v Moldova
Wales v Serbia

2017
Mar 24 Austria v Moldova
Georgia v Serbia
Republic of Ireland v Wales
Jun 11 Moldova v Georgia
Republic of Ireland v Austria
Serbia v Wales
Sep 2 Georgia v Republic of Ireland
Serbia v Moldova
Wales v Austria
Sep 5 Austria v Georgia
Moldova v Wales
Republic of Ireland v Serbia
Oct 6 Austria v Serbia
Georgia v Wales
Republic of Ireland v Moldova
Oct 9 Moldova v Austria
Serbia v Georgia
Wales v Republic of Ireland

Group E

2016
Sep 4 Denmark v Armenia
Kazakhstan v Poland
Romania v Montenegro
Oct 8 Armenia v Romania
Montenegro v Kazakhstan
Poland v Denmark
Oct 11 Denmark v Montenegro
Kazakhstan v Romania
Poland v Armenia
Nov 11 Armenia v Montenegro
Denmark v Kazakhstan
Romania v Poland

2017
Mar 26 Armenia v Kazakhstan
Montenegro v Poland
Romania v Denmark
Jun 10 Kazakhstan v Denmark
Montenegro v Armenia
Poland v Romania
Sep 1 Denmark v Poland
Kazakhstan v Montenegro
Romania v Armenia
Sep 4 Armenia v Denmark
Montenegro v Romania
Poland v Kazakhstan
Oct 5 Armenia v Poland
Montenegro v Denmark
Romania v Kazakhstan
Oct 8 Denmark v Romania
Kazakhstan v Armenia
Poland v Montenegro

Group F

2016
Sep 4 Lithuania v Slovenia
Malta v Scotland
Slovakia v England
Oct 8 England v Malta
Scotland v Lithuania
Slovenia v Slovakia
Oct 11 Lithuania v Malta
Slovakia v Scotland
Slovenia v England
Nov 11 England v Scotland
Malta v Slovenia
Slovakia v Lithuania

2017
Mar 26 England v Lithuania
Malta v Slovakia
Scotland v Slovenia
Jun 10 Lithuania v Slovakia
Scotland v England
Slovenia v Malta
Sep 1 Lithuania v Scotland
Malta v England
Slovakia v Slovenia
Sep 4 England v Slovakia
Scotland v Malta
Slovenia v Lithuania
Oct 5 England v Slovenia
Malta v Lithuania
Scotland v Slovakia
Oct 8 Lithuania v England
Slovakia v Malta
Slovenia v Scotland

Group G

2016
Sep 5 Albania v Macedonia
Israel v Italy
Spain v Liechtenstein
Oct 6 Italy v Spain
Liechtenstein v Albania
Macedonia v Israel
Oct 9 Albania v Spain
Israel v Liechtenstein
Macedonia v Italy
Nov 12 Albania v Israel
Liechtenstein v Italy
Spain v Macedonia

2017
Mar 24 Italy v Albania
Liechtenstein v Macedonia
Spain v Israel
Jun 11 Israel v Albania
Italy v Liechtenstein
Macedonia v Spain
Sep 2 Albania v Liechtenstein
Israel v Macedonia
Spain v Italy
Sep 5 Italy v Israel
Liechtenstein v Spain
Macedonia v Albania
Oct 6 Italy v Macedonia
Liechtenstein v Israel
Spain v Albania
Oct 9 Albania v Italy
Israel v Spain
Macedonia v Liechtenstein

Group H

2016
Sep 6 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Estonia
Cyprus v Belgium
Oct 7 Belgium v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece v Cyprus
Oct 10 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Cyprus
Estonia v Greece
Nov 13 Belgium v Estonia
Greece v Bosnia-Herzegovina

2017
Mar 25 Belgium v Greece
Cyprus v Estonia
Jun 9 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Greece
Estonia v Belgium
Aug 31 Cyprus v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece v Estonia
Sep 3 Estonia v Cyprus
Greece v Belgium
Oct 7 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Belgium
Cyprus v Greece
Oct 10 Belgium v Cyprus
Estonia v Bosnia-Herzegovina

Group I

2016
Sep 5 Croatia v Turkey
Ukraine v Iceland
Oct 6 Iceland v Finland
Turkey v Ukraine
Oct 9 Finland v Croatia
Iceland v Turkey
Nov 12 Croatia v Iceland
Ukraine v Finland

2017
Mar 24 Croatia v Ukraine
Turkey v Finland
Jun 11 Finland v Ukraine
Iceland v Croatia
Sep 2 Finland v Iceland
Ukraine v Turkey
Sep 5 Iceland v Ukraine
Turkey v Croatia
Oct 6 Croatia v Finland
Turkey v Iceland
Oct 9 Finland v Turkey
Ukraine v Croatia

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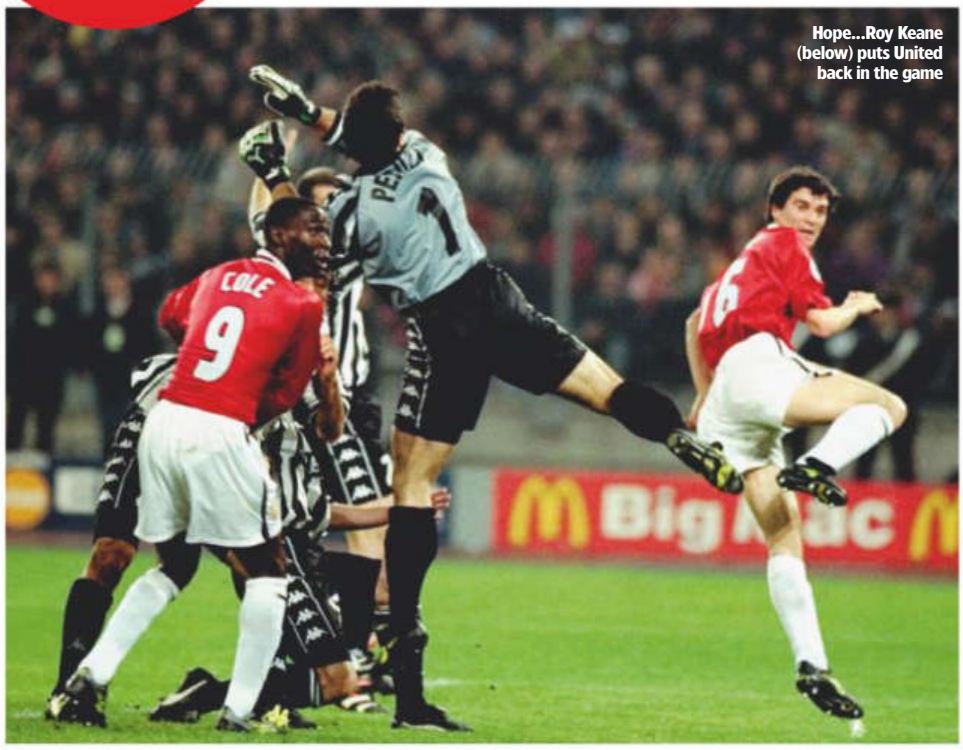
World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

APRIL 21, 1999, TURIN: CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMI-FINAL, SECOND LEG

Juventus 2 Man United 3

A stunning comeback at the Stadio delle Alpi sealed United's first European Cup Final for 31 years



Hope...Roy Keane (below) puts United back in the game

Having only snatched a 1-1 draw in the home leg thanks to Ryan Giggs' 90th-minute equaliser, it looked all over for Manchester United when they went 2-0 down in the first 10 minutes of the return at the Stadio delle Alpi.

However, as *World Soccer* reported in its June 1999 edition, Alex Ferguson's side fought back to record "one of the most remarkable recoveries of European history" and reach that year's Champions League Final.

Caught cold by two Filippo Inzaghi goals, United's Roy Keane pulled one back with a neat header from a corner, but nine minutes later he was booked by Swiss referee Urs Meier for a foul on Zinedine Zidane. The caution meant United's skipper would miss the Final if United were to get there.

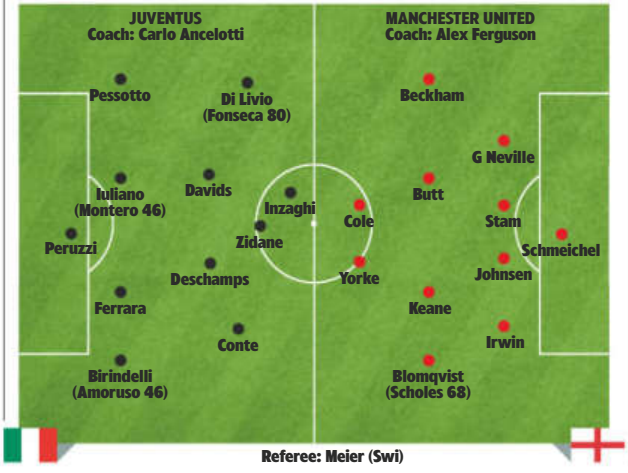
A minute later, Dwight Yorke equalised with a diving header to put the visitors ahead on away goals, and *World Soccer* noted: "Manager Ferguson's skills became more evident. He had preferred to use the more pragmatic Butt to Scholes in midfield, thus helping to nullify the threat of Conte and Zidane. And gradually the tide turned in United's favour."

There was, however, a further twist as Paul Scholes, who came on as a 68th-minute sub, suffered the same fate as Keane when a yellow card meant he too would miss any Final appearance.

And that was put beyond all doubt when Yorke broke free with six minutes to go. When he was brought down in the Juventus box, Andy Cole turned home the loose ball to make it 3-2.

With Keane and Scholes absent for the Final in Barcelona, Manchester United produced yet another dramatic comeback, beating Bayern Munich 2-1 with goals in injury time from Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. WS

Reds...David Beckham (left) and Gary Neville



Referee: Meier (Swi)

KEY MOMENTS

Opener...Filippo Inzaghi puts Juve in front

6min A low cross to the back post by Zinedine Zidane is turned in by Filippo Inzaghi. **1-0**

10min Inzaghi gets a touch in front of Jaap Stam and a deflection beats Peter Schmeichel. **2-0**

24min Roy Keane rises above the Juventus defence to glance a header into the net from a David Beckham corner. **2-1**

33min A late tackle by Keane on Zidane produces a yellow card, which means the United captain will miss the Final should they go through.

34min Another Beckham cross and Dwight Yorke's diving header beats Angelo Peruzzi in the Juve goal. **2-2**

39min A Yorke effort hits the post with Peruzzi well beaten.

61min Inzaghi scrambles the ball into the back of the net but the flag is up for offside.

74min Denis Irwin hits the post for United before putting the rebound into the side netting.

Out...Paul Scholes will miss the Final

77min United substitute Paul Scholes is shown a yellow card and will also miss the Final if United get through.

84min Peruzzi brings down Yorke in the penalty area but the ball runs free to Andy Cole who shoots into an empty net. **2-3**

Winner...Andy Cole scores United's third

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